

Contracts awarded for hauling in and disposing of derelicts

By HARRY EAGAR, Staff Writer

PUUNENE – On Wednesday, the county signed a contract with SOS Metals Island Recycling LLC to handle the cars and appliances abandoned along Maui's roads and in open fields. "We're going to save the taxpayers big time, over one million dollars a year," says Bruce Mizel, who manages the car crushing operation that opened in August at Central Maui Baseyard.

The exact amount cannot be predicted because the county is not guaranteeing SOS any minimum number of cars and old washing machines. The owner of the company that's been handling most of the towing said the number of junked cars being hauled in has been rising – but he expects the backlog of junkers will be cleared within a year.

"In another nine months to a year, I think we'll have picked up a lot of the abandoned vehicles, and it's going to really fall off," said Jack Freitas of Maui Tow & Transport. "The county finally got a handle on it. I think the job is being done right now."

Mizel says he expects to receive around 300 junked cars a month. SOS bid \$108.88 per car and \$21.88 per appliance to dispose of the junk.

The county had been paying Kitagawa Towing & Transport \$305 per car and \$60 for "white goods" like refrigerators and water heaters.

Shelley Pellegrino, an executive assistant to Mayor Alan Arakawa, says the amount budgeted for cleaning up island roads is about \$3.2 million this fiscal year. That should be adequate.

It includes removing hundreds of junkers stored temporarily at the closed Waihee landfill during the period when Maui didn't have any operating car crushers.

Now it has two. Kitagawa appealed an earlier award of county business to SOS. Pellegrino says that has not been ruled on, but the county is going ahead with the new contract since the need is pressing.

Kitagawa Towing owner Mike Kitagawa said he will protest any contract based on a claim that the county is not treating all bidders fairly. When he initiated his metal recycling service to help the county deal with the accumulating mass of junked cars, he said he was required to construct an enclosed facility. But the county waived the requirement for SOS Metals. "It's a highly biased process. It's unfair to the local Maui business after we've handled more than 6,000 cars to date for the county," he said. "The county cannot just waive all the requirements. There is no emergency."

The county is issuing 10 to 12 tow orders a day for derelict and abandoned vehicles, Pellegrino says.

A derelict is a ruined vehicle, missing major parts, burned or otherwise past recovery. Abandoned vehicles, which could be fixed, are taken to the Maui Tow & Transport storage yard and offered for sale at auctions held about once a month. Not many are sold, says Pellegrino, so most will end up in SOS' crusher. The crushing and disposal fee is just part of the expense.

The county pays \$80 to \$150 for towing in derelicts, depending on location. Abandoned

vehicles are more expensive. There are two tows – one to the storage site at the Central Maui Baseyard, around \$25, and then another to SOS – plus \$5 a day storage charge, which usually totals to around \$150.

The county will pay SOS \$21.88 to dispose of white goods, plus incur other haulage costs. Towing of derelicts and abandoneds is handled by three different Maui companies: Kitagawa Towing & Transport, Tasmanian Towing, and Maui Tow & Transport. Freitas with Maui Tow & Transport says there's been a sharp increase in business over the past year with efforts by the county and Community Work day to clear away derelicts.

He recalled that the county previously failed to plan adequately for dealing with the problem, hampered by the shutdown of Maui Scrap Metal in April last year. Maui Scrap Metals had been the only company handling vehicles and appliances, but was unable to resolve long-standing violations that blocked renewal of its solid waste permit.

Earlier this year, the county had to hold up handling of abandoned vehicles and appliances because the beautification fund paying for hauling and disposal of derelicts ran out before the end of the fiscal year.

With contracts in place for hauling in junked vehicles and appliances, and for disposal of the derelicts, Freitas said he expected most of Maui's dump sites will be cleared away within a year.

In an attempt to discourage dumping, the county began to bill the last registered owner of an abandoned car for costs when the owner can be identified.

Pellegrino says about 250 letters have been sent out, and about 20 owners have paid up. Some of the rest are still pending, but others have been turned over to a collection agency. SOS Metals Island Recycling LLC is a local subsidiary of a large recycling operation based in California, which has its own foundries to melt scrap metal for recycling.

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