

Sending out an SOS

Will Maui's new scrap metal player save the day?

By Jared Libby

Junk cars curiously started popping up on Maui two years ago like rusty, burned-out crop circles. The phenomenon gathered into a concern, then a crisis and has now become a bitter joke. As soon as one car gets towed off the roadside, it seems another suddenly materializes and take its place.

Stepping into this island-wide disaster is SOS Island Recycling, which hopes to soon begin operating a new scrap metal recycling facility on a three-acre plot at the Maui Baseyard. According to company vice president Sandy Shadrow, the site will include a 12,000 square-foot enclosed warehouse, a high speed auto bailer—a car crusher—and an Envirorac system, which is used to safely separate fluids from old vehicles.

Together with his brother Don, Shadrow has been in the business of turning junk cars, appliances and even jet engines into reusable metals for nearly 30 years. Both men, he said, recently bought homes on Maui and saw a huge demand for their services.

“We’d drive around and see hundreds of abandoned appliances and cars,” Shadrow said. “It’s a mess.”

Maui County Environmental Coordinator Rob Parsons agreed with Shadrow’s assessment. Parsons, who acts as a county liaison for the mayor’s office on a wide range of environmental processes, said meetings with the Shadrow brothers have really encouraged him.

“We need their help and expertise,” said Parsons. “I’m happy someone with 30 years of experience is coming to bring us into the future.”

Shadrow said SOS is investing \$1 million dollars into the site and has developed cutting edge environmental control containers that should keep residual pollution to a minimum. The company’s website boasts of the company’s “team of seasoned professionals who combine efficient recycling with environmental responsibility.”

Despite the company’s record, it’s not without at least one blemish. In 2004, an agency representing the town of Pico Rivera in California sued SOS for the costs incurred from environmental cleanup on a piece of property SOS used for a similar scrap-recycling operation.

Court documents cite elevated levels of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) in the soil. PCBs are commonly found in fluids used in home appliances, automobiles and other machinery. The EPA lists PCBs as a known human carcinogen citing “overwhelming evidence that PCBs cause cancer in animals.”

Shadrow said the case was settled two years ago and much of the pollution left over was from an automobile wrecking yard that occupied the site before SOS. “Any controversy there has been resolved,” Shadrow explained.

Genie Watson, a spokesperson for the California law firm Daehnke and Cruz, which represented Pico Rivera in the case, said they could not comment regarding the complaints against SOS.

Shadow insisted that his operation would be the most efficient and environmentally conscious on the island. A concrete surface and enclosed structure will limit the impact on soil and cut down on runoff, he said, something other scrap operations on the island don't have.

Parsons said since the closing of Maui Scrap Metal in Wailuku last spring, the demand for scrap recycling is higher than ever. The only game in town for some time, Maui Scrap didn't do many of the things required by the EPA and the Department of Health, he said, which in part led to the yard's closure. Since then, Kitigawa Towing has been handling the bulk of the island's scrap auto and appliance collection said Parsons.

"SOS will provide us with a second choice," Parsons said. "We'll have a little more control of our destiny."

Shadow said SOS could begin accepting scrap metal by this summer and will begin serving Maui's business community first. As the operation gains momentum, Shadow said all types of scrap from customers island-wide would be accepted at a minimal or possibly no charge.

"We're going to try not to charge anything," Shadow said. But added he couldn't know for sure until he gets a better feel for what it will cost to dispose of fluids and other hazardous wastes. The drastic need for a solution to Maui's scrap recycling problem was something the Shadow brothers could not ignore, he explained.

"It's like if a doctor was sitting by the pool and a guy has a heart attack. What's he gonna say? 'Sorry I'm on vacation?'" Shadow said. "We just couldn't stand by without doing something. Maui needs this." MTW