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Coca-Cola to put \$60M in county recycling plant

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Coca-Cola announced Wednesday a partnership with Spartanburg-based United Resource Recovery Corp. to build a plastic-bottle recycling plant in Spartanburg County, part of a long-term initiative by the soft-drink company to have 100 percent of its plastic bottles be recycled or reused.

The new facility, which will be used for what is called "bottle-to-bottle" recycling, is expected to be fully operational by 2009 and bring about 100 jobs to the area in the next five years.

Coca-Cola will invest \$60 million in the project, which includes the facility and a new recycling initiative. URRC, at 5396 N. Blackstock Road, will build its new facility on an adjacent 30 acres, said Kara Borie of the South Carolina Department of Commerce.

Carlos Gutierrez, president of URRC, said in a Department of Commerce news release: "The potential of this business is vitally important to the global recycling economy and the environment, and we are well positioned for the future."

An employee for URRC said Gutierrez would not be available for further comment until Thursday afternoon. Borie said URRC now has about 40 employees.

First of its kind in United States

Coca-Cola has built similar recycling plants in Switzerland, Mexico, Austria and the Philippines, but the Spartanburg plant will be the first in the United States and the largest in the world.

At its peak production, the plant will produce 100 million pounds of food-grade recycled polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic per year, or the equivalent of about two billion 20-ounce plastic Coke bottles.

Ultimately, Coca-Cola hopes all of its plastic bottles will be recycled or reused. But in the short term, Coca-Cola spokeswoman Diana Garza Ciarlante said, the company is aiming for 30 percent of its plastic bottles to be recycled or reused by 2010.

The \$60 million Coca-Cola will invest in the project will fund the facility, expected to cost about \$50 million, and the promotion of recycling programs, including the newly formed Coca-Cola Recycling and RecycleBank, a rewards program that currently operates out of the

Northeast.

Coca-Cola, which is based in Atlanta, said recycling requires less energy than using new materials to make bottles.

The company said the Spartanburg plant will eliminate one million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year, the equivalent of removing 21,500 cars from the road.

"Today was the stake in the ground," Garza Ciarlante said. "We're aspiring to a goal, and we're beginning to build the infrastructure needed to meet the goal."

New jobs for Spartanburg

Wednesday morning, before its announcement about the plant, Coca-Cola announced it would lay off between 100 and 125 U.S.-based employees to spur growth and boost profits.

But for Spartanburg, the new recycling plant will mean new jobs.

"There will be job opportunities that will be associated with it," said Carter Smith, president and CEO of the Spartanburg County Economic Development Corp. "Those are very important to us, particularly in these days."

URRC was founded in 1992 with the goal of reclaiming used silver from discarded film and X-rays. A few years later, the company patented a process by which PET plastic, commonly used for plastic bottles and other synthetics, could be ground into small flakes, cleaned to Food and Drug Administration standards, and dried out again into flakes, which could then be reused.

In 1996, the company entered a five-year partnership with Coca-Cola to produce food-packaging material. URRC has been one of Coca-Cola's partners in the foreign recycling plants.

In 2006, residents of the Fairforest area protested URRC's petition for air-construction permits to expand its facilities, complaining about foul smells coming from the facility. The company was allowed to proceed.

Staff Writer Lynne Shackleford contributed to this report.

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