

BUSINESS



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PLAIN DEALING

SHERYL HARRIS



Vacuum company has dirty record

Q: I was in the hospital in November when I saw an infomercial about Singer Lazer Storm vacuum cleaners for under \$100. I called the 800 number to order one. In the middle of the call, I changed my mind, and, since the order hadn't been finalized, I just hung up.

Well, my bank account was debited \$418.62. I called the company to ask what was going on, and they told me I had ordered four vacuum cleaners, plus bags to go with them. I told them they were wrong, and they said we would get a refund, but we never have. When my wife and I call, they always tell us the check's on its way out. Last time my wife called, she got put on hold for 30 minutes and then was disconnected. Something is not right here.

James Boddy, Maple Heights

A: Does anyone besides me think it's a really bad idea to pipe infomercials into the hospital rooms of people who may be taking heavy doses of medication?

The company you ordered the vacuum cleaner from is called IGIA Inc. It finally sent you a refund of \$418.62.

You might not remember IGIA's name as well as you do its infomercials selling products like the Ion-Aire hair dryer, the Thermo-Spa paraffin bath and the Epil-Stop hair-removal device.

Complaints about the company's handling of Epil-Stop sales prompted the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to sue IGIA and its Tactica subsidiary in 2004. Both companies signed a consent agreement promising not to violate the Mail Order Sales Rule, which requires companies to ship products as promised and to give consumers the chance to cancel if the company failed to ship their orders without delay.

IGIA's Tactica unit recently emerged from bankruptcy reorganization. It blamed its problems on a fulfillment service that padlocked its warehouses after Tactica had trouble paying it for its services.

It's not clear IGIA learned much from its experiences. The company currently has unsatisfactory or "F" ratings from Better Business Bureaus in New York and Los Angeles.

Complaints from consumers involve everything from delivery to refunds to advertising issues. The BBB says the company is not responding to the complaints.

The Internet is humming with stories of people who ordered a single vacuum cleaner and saw their order automatically quadrupled.

I'm going to give you a summary of my interactions with the company, so you can get a sense of the level of professionalism here.

On Feb. 8, I tried calling the company's attorney, Paul Greenfield, about your problem, but the call was intercepted by a woman who said she was the floor manager for customer service and insisted she could handle this matter.

This floor manager — she very reluctantly disclosed that her name is Monica Mason — said the company had changed several suppliers and that had held up both shipments and refunds. She checked your file, said that you were indeed due a refund and that — in an amazing coincidence — the check was going out that very day.

Five days later, you hadn't received so much as a postcard. I got through to Greenfield to say how disappointed I was. He said he "heard" me and would have someone call me back.

I then got a voice mail message from a woman who said "This is IGIA" and never left her name — not first, not last. I hate that. The anonymous woman left me the company's general number, so that when I tried to return her call, I had no idea whom to ask for.

SEE HARRIS | 65

Turning garbage into energy

Cleveland firm makes trucks go on trash fumes

JOHN FUNK | PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Great Scott! Science can now make food-grade carbon dioxide as well as high-quality methane motor fuel from the putrid stuff called landfill gas.

That's what Acrion Technologies Inc. of Cleveland and its business partners are about to do on a commercial scale.

If you think this sounds a little like science fiction, you're right.

Consider the movie "Back to the Future III." Mad scientist Emmett "Doc" Brown used a "Mr. Fusion" to turn garbage into energy for his DeLorean's flux capacitor.

But Doc Brown isn't the only one who sees garbage as an untapped natural resource. So does engineer Bill Brown, Acrion's president.

Acrion's patented process is not nearly as far-fetched as Mr. Fusion.

Landfill gas is roughly 55 percent methane and 45 percent carbon dioxide, with less than 1 percent contaminants, said Brown.

SEE ACRION | 64



(1) Today's trash at the Franklin County landfill near Columbus will become tomorrow's natural gas thanks to (2) technology developed by Cleveland-based Acrion Technologies, Inc., which last year concluded a demonstration project to produce clean "pipeline quality" methane from raw landfill gas (3) at the Burlington County Resource Recovery Complex near Trenton, N.J., where (4) Mack Truck and Waste Management Inc. partnered to burn the gas in two garbage trucks designed to run on liquified natural gas, or LNG.

Millions of cubic feet of landfill gas (left) are burned 24 hours a day in "flares" like this one, wasting enough fuel to power nearly every garbage truck in the nation.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ACRION

MADE HERE

By Jennifer Scott Cimperman

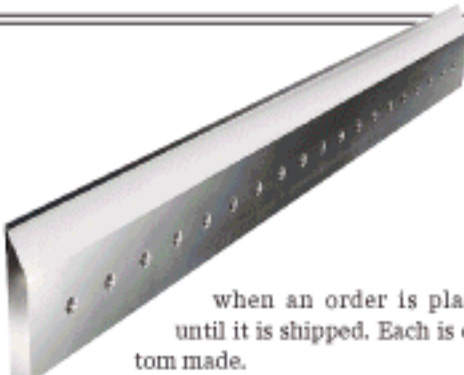
Inlaid carbide machine knife

BRAND NAME: ICE (Inlaid Carbide Extreme)

MAKER: Great Lakes Industrial Knife Co.

WHERE IT'S MADE: Akron

HOW IT'S MADE: Strips of tungsten carbide, 37 inches long when delivered by a supplier, must be bonded to produce knives up to 190 inches long. In a process called "diffusion bonding," machines use heat and pressure to bond carbide end to end — without any seams. "If there are any seams, it [the finished knife] typically will not give the proper cut," said Ron Kara, president. A furnace bonds seamless strips with steel backing material. A precision grinding machine grinds an edge, and milling machines drill and tap mounting holes. On average, one knife takes eight weeks from



when an order is placed until it is shipped. Each is custom made.

HOW IT'S USED: Mostly by the paper or film industries, which attach knives to guillotine trimmers to cut paper or film.

BACKGROUND: "There are a lot of knife manufacturers, but there are a lot of niches," said Kara, who founded the company in 1981. Its specialty: knives made of tungsten carbide or titanium carbide. "People get these things confused with hand knives. We make nothing that's held in your hand. Everything is bolted to a machine."

SOURCE: Great Lakes Industrial Knife Co.

Made Here spotlights items produced in Northeast Ohio. Submit suggestions to madehere@plaind.com or Made Here, The Plain Dealer, 1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland 44114. For previous Made Here products, go to www.cleveland.com/madehere.

Got tax questions? Give the pros a call

You got rolling on your taxes, but now you're stumped.

You're not quite sure if you really can deduct those unreimbursed business expenses or charitable contributions.

Don't fret. The Plain Dealer has assembled a panel of 30 tax professionals to field your questions and give you advice. Our annual tax call-in takes place from 2 to 5 p.m. today and 6 to 9 p.m. Monday.

These volunteers won't be able to do your entire tax return over the phone, but they can help you work through problems. So gather up your materials, get your questions ready and call 216-999-4300 or 1-800-447-6915 — only during call-in hours, please.

A special 12-page tax section published in The Plain Dealer last week also is available online, along with audio of Plain Dealer reporter Teresa Dixon Murray's tax software commentary, a daily blog of reader tips and more. Go to www.cleveland.com/taxguide.



A consumer's guide to residential natural gas rates

Here are the latest natural gas rates compiled by the Ohio Consumers' Counsel from independent marketing companies. An expanded chart is on the agency's Web site, www.pickocc.org. Prices are subject to change and should be confirmed with the supplier. In addition to the rates listed, there are taxes and local delivery charges. Consumers should also ask about cancellation fees. Consumers who aren't served by independent companies pay the gas cost recovery rate charged by their utility.

Gas cost recovery rates for March

Dominion East Ohio Gas Co.: \$11.07 per 1,000 cubic feet (Mcf) of gas
Columbia Gas of Ohio: \$1.14 per 100 cubic feet (ccf) of gas

Supplier	Contact information	Dominion East Ohio service areas	Columbia Gas service areas
Commerce Energy (formerly ACN Energy)	1-877-226-5371 www.commerceenergy.com	\$11.81 / Mcf Monthly variable	\$1.251 / ccf Monthly variable
		\$12.12 / Mcf 1-year fixed	\$1.178 / ccf 1-year fixed
Direct Energy	1-888-566-9988 www.directenergy.com	\$12.99 / Mcf 2-year fixed	\$1.229 / ccf 2-year fixed
Dominion East Ohio Energy	1-877-796-0957 www.dom.com	\$12.95 / Mcf Fixed through March '07 ¹	\$1.265 / ccf Fixed through March '07 ²
Energy Cooperative of Ohio (through SOAR Energy)	1-877-439-3706 www.soarenergy.org	\$10.75 / Mcf Monthly variable	\$1.105 / ccf Monthly variable
Interstate Gas Supply	1-877-444-7427 www.igsenergy.com	\$13.49 / Mcf Fixed through March '07	\$1.489 / ccf Fixed through March '07
MXenergy	1-800-785-4373 www.mxenergy.com	\$13.99 / Mcf 3-year fixed	\$1.369 / ccf 3-year fixed
		\$12.99 / Mcf 1-year fixed	\$1.417 / ccf 1-year fixed
		\$12.44 / Mcf 15-months fixed	\$1.281 / ccf 15-months fixed
		\$19.02 / Mcf Monthly variable	\$1.111 / ccf Monthly variable
Shell Energy Services	1-877-557-4355 www.shellenergy.com	\$13.20 / Mcf 1-year fixed	\$1.35 / ccf 1-year fixed
		\$10.95 / Mcf 6 months fixed	\$1.095 / ccf 6 months fixed
		\$11.50 / Mcf Monthly variable	\$1.15 / ccf Monthly variable
Vectron Source	1-800-516-6740 www.vectronsource.com	\$12.50 / Mcf 1-year fixed	\$1.56 / ccf 1-year fixed
		\$10.10 / Mcf Monthly variable	\$1.086 / ccf Monthly variable
WPS Energy Services	1-888-367-4493 www.wpsenergy.com	\$10.934 / Mcf Variable capped rate, through March 07 ³	\$1.086 / ccf Variable capped rate, through March 07 ⁴
		\$10.85 / Mcf Quarterly variable ⁵	\$1.092 / ccf Quarterly variable ⁶
		Monthly variable 1-year ⁵	Monthly variable 1-year ⁶
		\$12.94 / Mcf Fixed through April '07 ⁶	\$1.325 / ccf Fixed through March '07 ⁶

¹ Dominion East Ohio Energy: Rate limited to the first 5,000 customers who sign up.
² Dominion East Ohio Energy: Offer not available in all areas.
³ WPS Energy Services: Not to exceed \$14.99 / Mcf plus sales tax. Restrictions and other details apply.
⁴ WPS Energy Services: Not to exceed \$1.52 / ccf plus sales tax. Restrictions and other details apply.
⁵ WPS Energy Services: Restrictions and other details apply.
⁶ WPS Energy Services: Offer not available in all areas; restrictions and other details apply.

SOURCE: Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel, 1-877-742-5622

THE PLAIN DEALER

"The project was completely successful. This is the only technology that has so far cleaned up landfill gas to make vehicle fuel-grade LNG."

Jim Wegrzyn,
Brookhaven technical project Manager

ACRION

FROM G1

Turning garbage into energy

By super cooling (to minus 60 degrees) and pressurizing (to 400 psi) landfill gas, the Acron system separates the methane from the carbon dioxide and then isolates the fluorocarbons, sulfides, silicones, hydrocarbons and other trace chemicals that make landfill gas nearly impossible to burn cleanly or sell to industry.

The small engineering company's technology is at the heart of an \$18 million project about to begin at the Franklin County landfill. There are ongoing negotiations with other landfills, including at least one in Northern Ohio.

The Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio, or SWACO, owns and operates the 363-acre site near Columbus and must now burn off the waste gases — up to 1.5 million cubic feet a day — in a 24-hour flare that produces air pollution. (Landfill gas must be collected because it can seep into sewers and basements. It must be burned at the biggest landfills because methane is suspected of causing global warming.)

Using Acron's system, FirmGreen Energy of Newport Beach, Calif., plans to refine the gas at the Columbus site into methane and carbon dioxide and then combine them in a second process to produce methanol — up to 10 million gallons per year.

The landfill will fuel as many as 25 of its 18-wheeler garbage transfer trucks with the methane gas, said SWACO Executive Director Mike Long, and use more of it to fire up a 75-kilowatt microturbine that will generate electricity for on-site use.

FirmGreen President Steve Wilburn said he is negotiating with another company to partner on mixing the methanol with soybean oil to produce biodiesel.

Tom Fontana, director of new-use development for the Soybean Council of Ohio, said the state should be able to provide soy oil. It was the seventh-largest soybean-producing state in the country in 2004, at 208 million bushels.

The carbon dioxide produced by FirmGreen will be sold as an industrial gas in a deal now pending with Mitsubishi Gas



Siwajek **Neyman** **Cook** **Brown**

Chemical Co., said Wilburn.

FirmGreen has an air permit application pending with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, said an agency spokesman, and is expected to receive the permit in a month or two.

Money for the project would come through revenue bonds issued by the Ohio Air Quality Development Authority. The company has talked with the agency, but has not made a formal application, said Mark Shanahan, executive director.

The plan, said Wilburn, is to have the facility built and operating by the first quarter of 2007.

Meanwhile, Brown and his associates Lawrence Siwajek, Jeffrey Cook and Marina Neyman continue to consult with FirmGreen and interested landfill operators around the globe, from offices located appropriately under the congested I-480 high-level bridge in Valley View, where clean-burning natural gas-powered vehicles would be appreciated.

After decades of research — Brown got the seed of the idea as a doctoral candidate at Case Western Reserve University in the 1970s — and about \$2 million in federal grants, the team conclusively proved the technology in two pilot demonstrations at the Burlington County Resource Recovery Complex in Columbus, N.J., south of Trenton.

The first project tapped a tiny stream of Burlington's landfill gas to create methane that was tested to be pure by an independent lab. In the second project, Acron added equipment to process the gaseous methane, manufacturing 350 gallons per day of liquefied natural gas, or LNG.

Waste Management Inc. lent two brand-new Mack Truck garbage haulers powered with engines Mack designed to run exclusively on LNG. The trucks were put on regular routes in October 2004 and by January 2005 had each run about 600 hours, traveling 5,000 miles. Mack engineers then tore down the engines and found them to be free of de-

posits that often form using regular "pipeline quality" gas.

The demonstration was paid for in part by the Department of Energy through a grant from the Brookhaven National Laboratory, in Long Island. Mack, Acron and Burlington had to file test reports with the federal lab.

"The project was completely successful," said Jim Wegrzyn, a Brookhaven technical project manager. "This is the only technology that has so far cleaned up landfill gas to make vehicle fuel-grade LNG."

Acron has licensed its technology to Mack to make LNG and to FirmGreen to make compressed natural gas, or CNG, as well as methanol and whatever else it chooses. The two companies are not on speaking terms and appear to be competing to sign contracts with landfills throughout the country.

FirmGreen's Wilburn said he has several prospects. Bruce Smackey, project engineer with Mack Trucks for the New Jersey demonstration project, declined to comment for the record.

Mack has prepared a feasibility study for Burlington County to scale up the Acron equipment at the New Jersey landfill, said Robert Simkins, district solid waste coordinator.

"We are looking at building a 12,000-gallon-per-day LNG facility," he said. "It would use about a third of our landfill gas and feed all of the garbage trucks delivering to our landfill, between 125 and 150 trucks."

Simkins thinks Acron's technology will revolutionize the garbage business. "This is the most exciting thing to happen in solid waste management in the 30 years I have worked for Burlington County."

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:
jfunk@plaind.com, 216-999-4138

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