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Nothing lies around in this Boneyard

Metro service makes construction waste desirable

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In the old days, when a local building was torn down, everything got hauled away to the landfill. That was before Metro introduced BoneyardNW, which helps used construction materials find their way to new projects.



JONATHAN HOUSE / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP
Salvaged flooring is just one of the many items on offer at BoneyardNW, where buyers can find construction materials from boilers to carpet tiles — and at bargain prices, too.

Launched in February, www.boneyardnw.com is a free service where buyers and sellers of used construction materials can connect.

Based at Portland's growing green-building community, BoneyardNW is part of Metro's goal to boost the region's total waste recovery to 64 percent by 2009.

Currently, about 20 percent of our region's waste comes from construction materials, mostly generated during demolition. BoneyardNW encourages demolition teams to take apart buildings more carefully in order to salvage what can be reused.

They can even make money by selling still-good items to new construction projects, giving designers and architects a low-cost source for quality materials.

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It's a win-win scenario for everyone, including the landfills.



Bryce Jacobson, a planner with Metro Solid Waste and Recycling, describes BoneyardNW as similar to Craigslist but specialized for used commercial building materials.



"These are not worn-out materials," he says. "They're almost new, and they need someplace to go."



BoneyardNW is restricted to commercial building materials – boilers, timbers and commercial carpet tiles – rather than items from residences.




"This is definitely not the kind of stuff you'd look at and say, 'That'd look great in my bathroom,'" Jacobson says.



The Web site is not out to compete with residential recyclers, and BoneyardNW directs people looking for residential items to Metro's online Recycling Toolkit. The San Francisco-based Craigslist also added a category called "materials for sale" to its Web site in April to accommodate residential materials.




All materials listed on BoneyardNW must come from commercial deconstruction in Multnomah, Washington or Clackamas counties. Buyers don't have to be commercial contractors, and they can be located anywhere in the world, as long as they can pick up the materials.




One person's junk ...



The number of used construction items listed on BoneyardNW at any given time varies, but has gone as high as 70 items and as low as about 10. Jacobson says the strangest item he ever saw listed was an old telephone booth from a casino.



Items can be sold or given away, and Metro has no involvement in the money that changes hands. Membership on the Web site is free and takes about two minutes to set up.



Al Kackman, project manager for Elder Demolition, says he was the first one to sign up with BoneyardNW. "I'm also the first one to sell something on there," he says. Kackman says that he has sold unit heaters, generators and HVAC units. "I even have a crane for sale," he says.




"If not for Boneyard, a lot of that stuff would go to the scrap yard," Kackman says. "Every time I put something on Boneyard, I get phone calls."

Jacobson says Metro started BoneyardNW for the simple reason that no one else was doing it. He says the Web site helps to further sustainability in Portland by making it easier to use fewer resources on construction projects and by reducing the overall environmental impact of building.

"Boneyard is the first of its kind," he says. "We don't have to pay the environmental price of going out and cutting a tree down."

Green building made easier

A big driver behind BoneyardNW is the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, which offers certification points to projects that reuse building materials instead of buying new.

LEED certification recognizes construction that helps to conserve energy and other resources, and can qualify a project for zoning allowances, tax rebates and other incentives.

Jacobson says there already are 80 members signed up on BoneyardNW, and

that the Web site has been getting good feedback from contractors.

The service has caught the attention of publications like AIArchitect – the magazine of the American Institute of Architects – and Environmental Design + Construction magazine.

Metro doesn't have any statistics to share on the success of BoneyardNW, since the site is so new. Jacobson says there will be a survey of users later in the year.

Kackman doesn't need to wait for a survey to know that BoneyardNW is working. He says Elder Demolition has realized a slight reduction in costs by selling items on BoneyardNW since February, and he expects the savings to increase as the Web site catches on.

"It's incredibly easy to use," he says. "We're always looking for ways to increase profits and reduce costs."

Since Metro is not directly involved in the buying and selling on BoneyardNW, the tricounty planning agency makes no guarantees on the items listed.

Jacobson suggests that buyers inspect items in person before agreeing to a sale. He also says buyers should be prepared to haul items off-site immediately.

Moving forward, BoneyardNW hopes to provide an online area to identify upcoming salvage and deconstruction projects, to give more lead time for posting and purchasing materials.

Jacobson also would like to see listings for structures that need to be relocated, and links to industries that support deconstruction and salvage, such as companies that will regrade used lumber for reuse in new projects.

"It's nice to have that outlet," Kackman says, though he laughs when he admits the only downside comes when he tells his competitors about the BoneyardNW Web site.

"I think it's a great program," he adds. "I think it can be more successful than Metro is expecting."

Find out more

For information about BoneyardNW and to set up a free account, visit www.boneyardnw.com.

For other recycling services, visit www.metro-region.org.

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