

## American Picker

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By CHRIS FOX, Associate Editor, *Product Design & Development* ([PD&D \[1\]](#))



It's not recycling, it's repurposing.

Just over a year ago, the owner of a waste company was struck with a vision for old billboard vinyls. Marketing departments use billboards to advertise to commuters, but those advertisements outdate quickly, and are no long of any use to marketing. The heavy vinyl material is discarded after only a few months (at best) of use. Apparently this material makes a great water-proof tarp. Enter Damon Carson, the owner and operator of Repurposed Materials (Denver, CO), a company based on the reuse of waste materials.

“One of the important things about our business is that we are not a recycling business, by definition,” explains Carson. “We focus on creative reuse.” Their products are taken from the sources that consider them waste, and are placed directly into market as a different product. It started when Carson discovered that outdated billboard vinyl could be reused as robust, water-proof tarps. “It didn’t start with any great vision for the business ... Working in the waste industry I saw all of the interesting things that were buried in landfills,” continues Carson, “This is my version of the waste stream for America, keep it out of the landfill, repurpose it.”

With interest in byproducts that have value as is, it becomes a tireless search to find new, or rather old, products to bring to market. Carson explains, “Ideally, we’re looking for things that just sit in the shop and are ready to be reused. Sourcing is important, and it’s always constant in the used game. We call it ‘bird-dogging,’ always seeking out what could be the next by-product.”

The repurposing of industry materials can even lead to better materials for other industries. For example, “There is a particular hose that is rated for 2,500 PSI, but they have to replace it after six months due to regulations. We get that to a farmer for irrigation, where he only needs to push 150 PSI through it.” In this sense the hose is over-engineered for the agriculture industry, but the repurposed hose could

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last a lifetime for the farmer. "Materials that are worn out for their original industry could last 50 years for a different one."

Their roster of products includes everything from Billboard Vinyl Tarps and Conveyor Belt Truck Lining to Snow Plow Rubber Speed Bumps and Street Sweeper Livestock Scratchers. In many ways, their products are often better than some of the new made-for materials that are used.

Thriving for the last year on a growing list of repurposed materials, the company is constantly looking for other ideas for reuse and development. "We don't have a research and development team, our customers are just that." Repurposed Materials relies on the demands and innovations of their customers and industrial partners.

Every idea is termed a repurposing candidate, and offered up to the customer base for evaluation. "We put it to our customer list, and see if they can find something to do with a material we have. We lay out the specs and let the customers develop the use for the materials," explains Carson. "I have my head in a lot of industries, but we can't be everywhere ... We don't know what they are using or need in the bowling alley industry, but if there is a byproduct they can use, we're happy to help."

One of the challenges in dealing with waste is the lack of attention these materials receive. "We want what they don't want, so it is usually low on everybody's priority list." Industries are willing to be green, but "nobody knows who's in charge of the garbage." As Repurposed Materials makes itself more renowned, they are constantly looking to expand. "Engineers are important to our search for new reuses," explains Carson. The engineering discipline stretches across several industries, and will prove to be a valuable resource as they search for new materials and new ways to repurpose.

As they try to manage their mounting growth, Carson is constantly "bird-dogging" for new partners in research and development. They have an open forum at [www.repurposedmaterialsinc.com](http://www.repurposedmaterialsinc.com) [2], where byproducts and ideas can be submitted. Carson says, "The beauty of repurposing is the unintended consequence. I truly believe this is a powder keg, and we've only just lit the fuse."

*What's your take? Let me know via email at [chris.fox@advantagemedia.com](mailto:chris.fox@advantagemedia.com) [3].*

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