

Too many tires still not enough for recycling plan



Wyoming Tire Inc., just west of Casper, was issued a citation in 2008 for several violations, including exceeding its permitted volume by more than 1.6 million cubic yards of tire material. (Dustin Bleizeffer/Star-Tribune)

By DUSTIN BLEIZEFFER
Star-Tribune energy reporter
Tuesday, February 10, 2009 9:02 PM MST

If you've ever bought a new set of tires in the Casper area, there's a good chance your old tires went to Dick Ayres' tire recycling yard on Casper's west side.

A Google Earth view of the Wyoming Tire Inc. yard in Mills shows a bold, black splotch spanning an area nearly the size of a football field and divided by several access roads.

Ayres proudly proclaims, "We have paid taxes in excess of \$460,000 (and) have not lied, stolen or cheated anyone. We have no trouble sleeping."

Ayres can easily list a dozen uses for tires -- whether the tires are whole, sliced in half, shredded or ground into a pile of what looks like black rice. But what Ayres has in his yard today, he might refer to as too much of a good thing.

"I had a hunch I was pushing on it," Ayres said recently.

By "it," Ayres referred to the maximum volume of tire material allowed under his permit with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality. Wyoming Tire Inc. was permitted to handle 1,300 cubic yards of tire material but was discovered in March of last year to have an estimated 1.7 million cubic yards of tire material, according to DEQ documents.

DEQ issued Ayres a "notice of violation" in May, and Ayres has been scrambling to reduce his tire inventory since.

"The weather being what it was, we didn't get a lot of shipping," Ayres said.

Several trailers stuffed with tires are parked in the yard, sent back by the port of entry because of high winds. Ayres is forced to pay larger tire recycling centers outside of Wyoming to take his stock.

Ayres explains that his estimated 1.7 million cubic yards of excess tire material was the result of his speculative ambition to add more recycling equipment and market the processed tire material. He said it's ironic that he could never collect enough tires to make it pay off.

He estimates it would take about \$6 million to build a plant to process used tires into "crumb rubber," a product easily marketed to a variety of industries. Although Ayres doesn't process the mammoth-sized tires used at coal mines, he said even if he did, he still wouldn't have the volume of tires needed to justify a crumb rubber plant.

For now, all Ayres can do is hope the wind doesn't blow and the ground dries up so he can ship out tires and come into compliance with the state.

"We had to call tire businesses out of state, in Colorado, Kansas and Utah. What they have, and we don't in Wyoming, is volume," Ayres said.