



A Posi-Track crawler conquered the landfill's 3-to-1 slope and saved more than 1,000 hours of handwork as it laid big-roll sod over a towering Florida landfill.

The St. Lucie County landfill, situated along I-95, near Fort Pierce, FL, had a problem. When it covered its 100-ft. high, 100,000-sq.-ft. mound of trash with a couple of feet of soil, nothing seemed to keep Florida's torrential rains from washing the dirt away.

"We tried just about everything, but had little luck," said Leo Cordeiro, solid waste manager for St. Lucie County. Even sodding the 3-to-1 slope with squared sections didn't work.

"We'd get a two-hour rain and the sod would wash right down that slope," said Cordeiro.

Covering the dirt with rolls of netting and then seeding the hill wasn't the answer, either. Again, rain simply took away the dirt, netting and seeds.

Finally, Nature's Keepers Landscaping of Fort Pierce entered the picture. Eventually, they developed a solution for which everyone was searching. But at first, the 31-man operation was as stumped as everybody.

"We went to a bid meeting a couple of years ago," said Stewart Feketa, vice president of Na-

nature's Keepers. "There were about five of us offering up ideas, but no real solutions came out of it. Even our idea wasn't the greatest."

Hey, it's an idea

Nature's Keeper's original proposal: A bulldozer would climb the slope carrying pallets of sod to a team of workers, who then would painstakingly pull the seams together.

And, even then, the rain might very well ruin all that hard work. And so the county continued to search for an answer, as did Nature's Keepers.

Finally, the solution came when Nature's Keeper bought an HD4500 Posi-Track all-purpose crawler built by ASV Inc. of Grand Rapids, MN. A relatively new category of work machine, the all-purpose crawler, with its rubber tracks and light footprint (3.0 psi), seemed to be just what the St. Lucie County landfill needed.

In addition to a variety of landscaping tasks, Nature's Keepers was having success with its new machine laying out big rolls of sod — as a result, they were achieving amazing results and saving a remarkable amount of time.

Much faster than hand work

By using a sod-rolling attachment fitted to the front of the machine through a quick-attach system, the company was working several times faster than by hand, said Feketa. The attachment grabbed the sod by extending rotating cones into both ends of the tube at the center of the roll. With the roll in front of the driver, the sod could then easily be laid directly along the seam. Moreover, as the machine rolled over the sod, it actually pressed the seams together and helped the sod stay in place — with no damage done.

But could the crawler work on such a steep slope? "There is not a wheeled machine made that would go on that 3-to-1 slope," said Feketa.

Crawler tames sod job from hell

By JAY LEMKE

If the all-purpose crawler could, Feketa knew rolling the sod would make the job not only faster and easier, but better.

Big rolls the answer

"Big rolls were certainly preferable to pallets," said Feketa. "On a 400-sq.-ft. pallet, there would have been 560 joints to join, yet with two 200-sq.-ft. rolls, there were four joints with a biodegradable mat under it to help hold the sod to the ground. On a hill where the sod doesn't want to be there anyway, that's significant."

It took only a quick demonstration of the machine easily climbing the loose soil on the slope to convince the county to give Nature's Keepers a shot.

Feketa had two men on the hill and one in a forklift. He handled the all-purpose crawler himself. With a big roll of sod attached to the front of the rubber-tracked machine, Feketa laid the sod as he angled his way up the slope. When the sod ran out, he returned to the base of the mound, where the forklift would feed him another roll. Meanwhile, the men on the side of the hill pulled the seams together. The job was completed in a day and a half.

"The Posi-Track glided up and down the hill all day long, and there was no raking to clear up its tracks because it left none thanks to the low ground pressure; we had a great day," Feketa said. "It would have taken eight men working five 10-hour days, at best, with any other method."

Rolled sod the only way

"It was an impressive operation, the way the machine ran up those slopes and in the amount of time it took," said Cordeiro. "The rolled sod is clearly the way to go. It stays on the hill and stops the water from uncovering the trash. We'll be doing all of our sodding with big rolls from now on."

According to Feketa, the Posi-Track seems to be ideally suited to laying out big rolls of sod.

"You can certainly attempt to lay big rolls of sod with a wheeled machine, but it's not as stable and it's difficult to go in a straight line to keep the seams tight," Feketa said.

"I think that's why some landscapers don't use big rolls, because they tried

using a machine that's not suited to the task." **LM**

About 25% of Nature's Keepers' business is now sodding with big rolls.

—The author is with Carmichael Lynch Spong, Minneapolis, MN.



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