

# recycling today



## Features - Cover Story **MASS PRODUCTION**

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Liberty Tire Recycling, Pittsburgh, is bringing the automotive industry's mass production model to the tire processing sector



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*Liberty Tire Recycling creates a range of products from tire-derived fuel to rubber mulch, pictured here, to crumb rubber that is used in the manufacturing of molded products.*

The automotive industry and the tire industry that supplies it each went through decades of evolution before pioneers such as Henry Ford and Harvey S. Firestone built companies on a national and then global scale.

The scrap tire processing and recycling sector, in its first few decades of development, has likewise witnessed the rise (and sometimes fall) of entrepreneurs who have built strong regional businesses serving a limited geographic market range.

Liberty Tire Recycling, Pittsburgh, has been making strides to be the pioneering entity in scrap tire processing, striving to create a tire recycling brand name that operates and is known from coast to coast.

## **FROM A TO Z**

Since it was founded in 2000, Liberty Tire Recycling has been led by CEO Jeffrey Kendall, who has a law degree from the University of Pittsburgh and who worked in the solid waste and recycling industries for several years before joining Liberty.

Kendall has overseen the construction of a company that has grown quickly and steadily through acquisition. Through Liberty's growth, it has acquired a number of different processing facilities that—combined—have allowed the company to become familiar with a full array of processing techniques and end market options.

“Recycled rubber made from scrap tires can be transformed into a variety of smart, sustainable, eco-friendly products in the marketplace,” says Kendall.

“Much of the recycled rubber produced by Liberty Tire is used as an additive to make rubberized asphalt, as crumb rubber that can be used in applications such as athletic fields, as tire-derived fuel and as rubber mulch in landscaping and playgrounds,” he continues.

Several makers of molded products also have been able to use crumb rubber as a feedstock, notes Kendall. Among the molded products being made with crumb rubber, he lists welcome mats, anti-fatigue mats, acoustical underlay material, portable speed bumps, weightlifting plates, railroad ties and fitness center floor coverings.

Liberty matches its ability to serve this wide range of end markets with a scrap tire collection infrastructure that allows it to keep its customers supplied.

The company has a network of locations throughout the United States and Canada. Kendall says some of these sites are used for tire collection and remediation alone, while many also are production facilities.

A map on the company's website ([www.libertytire.com](http://www.libertytire.com)) shows 21 collection sites in 14 states and 16 production facilities in 12 of those states. (Some facilities serve a dual purpose.) Since that map was posted, however, Liberty Tire Recycling has made additional acquisitions, including facilities in New York State and Ontario.

Geographically, the company's presence is strongest in the Great Lakes region, the Upper Midwest and the Southeast Atlantic Coast region, but it also has facilities in Texas, Oklahoma and Utah.

## THE RIGHT TIMING

Liberty Tire has assembled its network at a time when tire recycling has moved beyond being viewed as a necessary evil by some parts of the supply chain to an opportunity and a corporate goal.

“Going green is no longer a trend,” says Kendall. Instead, he says, “It’s a mandate in just about every corner of the marketplace—consumer goods, construction, transportation and more.”

The company has positioned itself to help companies meet this mandate—and to consider it an opportunity—at perhaps just the right time. “Liberty Tire Recycling’s sole focus is to collect and recycle North America’s scrap tires and then turn them into the raw materials for smart, sustainable products,” says Kendall. “With this in mind, we are strategically positioned to assist companies as they work to meet the growing demand for recycled content in their consumer and industrial products and applications.”

Several other economic or governmental factors also are combining to either create challenges or offer opportunities for Liberty Tire. One issue that Kendall hopes is largely behind the company (and the tire recycling industry) is a perception about the health and safety of products made from recycled tires.

“Liberty Tire Recycling continues to combat the persistent misconception about the safety of recycled rubber and products made from recycled rubber,” says Kendall. “In study after study in state after state, researchers and scientists have come to one universal conclusion: Recycled rubber and recycled rubber products do not pose a significant health or environmental hazard,” he adds.

In December of 2009, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a report finding no concentrations of any potentially hazardous materials in crumb rubber that reach levels considered harmful. The federal study followed earlier ones in California and New York that reached identical conclusions.

“However, many consumers are still not aware of these scientific studies and cling to the misconception that crumb rubber is somehow unsafe,” says Kendall. “Through public information campaigns and other

## Liberty Tire Recycling at a Glance

CEO: Jeffrey Kendall

Locations: Headquarters in Pittsburgh; processing and collection facilities in 15 states and Ontario

No. of Employees: 1,137

Equipment: A variety of equipment is used to size-reduce scrap tires using ambient and cryogenic processes to create crumb rubber

Services Provided: Collects scrap tires from auto service stations, retailers, municipalities, fleet garages, military bases and tire manufacturing plants; creates tire-derived fuel, material for rubberized asphalt, crumb rubber for molded products, rubber mulch and crumb rubber infill for athletic fields

engagements, Liberty Tire Recycling has taken a leading role in educating the public on the safety of crumb rubber in its many applications. Our goal is to make sure that elected leaders, businesses and the general public can make informed decisions about products made from recycled rubber.”

Among the other issues and challenges that keep Kendall and his executive team busy are safety issues, state regulations affecting tire disposal and collection and encouraging government efforts to procure products made from recycled materials—such as playground products and asphalt additives made from recycled tires. (See the sidebar “Issues and Answers” on page 34.)

## **THE SAME DIRECTION**

Within the company’s framework, much of Kendall’s and his executive team’s time and energy have gone into standardizing and unifying the way Liberty Tire Recycling operates.

“Over the past several years, Liberty Tire Recycling has grown dramatically as an organization to include a network of production facilities across North America,” Kendall comments. “Much of this has been accomplished through acquisition. Because of this growth, the company is currently focused on Our Liberty, a company-wide initiative designed to ensure that Liberty Tire Recycling maintains the highest standards and the best practices across all our operations.”

The Our Liberty program is designed not only to bring employees onto the same page, but also to make managers in Pittsburgh more accessible to employees in the field. “I believe that a company should be transparent and communicative with its employees about the company’s goals and objectives,” says Kendall. “This is one of the key drivers behind Our Liberty and the effort to maintain the very highest standards and practices when it comes to the collection and recycling of scrap tires. We know that we can only achieve these goals by constantly seeking and achieving buy-in from our employees.”

Kendall is optimistic that adherence to best practices in all of the states in which Liberty operates can help the company prosper. “Our reach and our commitment to uniform standards and practices sets us apart,” he comments. “Our team works closely with new acquisitions to help them understand the standards and practices we look for them to adopt, and why these standards and practices are critical to the ongoing success of the company. Our Liberty reaches across just about every discipline—from manufacturing and safety to transportation, logistics, accounting and human resources,” he adds. “This is a value proposition to our clients as well, because they know that when they partner with us, they are working with a company that is committed to quality.”

The Liberty Tire approach has thus far resulted in a network of facilities that collects and processes about 1.5 billion pounds of rubber products made from scrap tires, says Kendall.

The economic turbulence of the past two years has brought challenges to the tire recycling sector as it has to every other sector. Kendall says, however, that Liberty has assembled its collection and processing network at a time when companies are ready to use it.

“The economy has been incredibly unpredictable over the past several years,” he remarks. “However, by creating a continental network of collection and production facilities, we can more effectively serve a larger number of customers,” he adds.

Kendall summarizes Liberty Tire’s position in the market by stating, “Our customers can rely on us as the leader in the industry that has developed standards and practices for quality, reliable recycling of scrap tires. Our infrastructure allows us to manage logistic costs and ensures a cost-competitive offering in this difficult economic marketplace.”

## ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Jeffrey Kendall, CEO of Liberty Tire Recycling, Pittsburgh, says there are several governmental issues that affect the way Liberty Tire approaches its customers and its manufacturing operations. Among these are:

- **Safety Issues** – “Governmental entities need to continue relying on the facts when it comes to the safety of crumb rubber in its various applications,” says Kendall. “The United States EPA and states across the country have come to the same conclusion: Crumb rubber does not pose a significant risk to the environment or to a person’s health. Municipalities should use these reliable studies as the basis for their decision to include crumb rubber in their paving projects, their construction of athletic fields or their efforts to make playgrounds safer.”
- **Tire Disposal** – “We believe it is critical that states regulate the proper disposal of tires,” says Kendall. “We also believe states need to create regulations and bonding requirements to ensure that operators do not create a safety hazard or leave behind a mess for the state to clean up. Banning tires from landfills and enforcing proper disposal provides a market mandate for services such as ours.”
- **Green Alternatives** – “Liberty Tire Recycling believes that municipalities and states across our nation can benefit from a variety of products that come from recycled rubber, including playground products and rubberized asphalt,” Kendall comments. “Often, government mandates are the key drivers for changing behavior or previous practices.”

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