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Stapleton site goes to pieces

6 million tons of concrete to be removed, recycled

By Steve Raabe
Denver Post Business Writer

Six million tons of the old Stapleton airport is on its way out, ready to be replaced by Denver's newest community.

Vast expanses of concrete runways are being torn apart to make way for the first residential development at Stapleton.

When asphalt and concrete are removed from the airport's southwestern quadrant, developer Forest City can begin installing utilities and building roads for the first 2,000 residential units to be constructed south of the vacant terminal on the 4,700-acre property.

But it's not as easy as it sounds. The mass of concrete used to build the airport's runways and aprons is staggering — enough to fill Mile High Stadium more than six times.

A 10-year job

The job is sufficiently large that Recycled Materials Co. of Arvada has budgeted six years to remove the material, and another four years to recycle it for use in new construction projects.

If that sounds daunting, consider that Recycled Materials entered into a contract which pays the firm nothing — not a single dollar — for its upfront work in removing the concrete and asphalt.

All of the company's revenue will come from the sale of old concrete reprocessed into fresh aggregate materials.

It's a contract like none other negotiated by Recycled Materials, said Mark Wachal, president. The deal was the result of six months

of negotiations between the company and the city.

"The city is not accustomed to getting something for nothing," he said. "There were a lot of comments like, 'That's not the way we do things.'"

But that's the way things turned out, and as a result, Recycled Materials is in the process of hauling away 400 tons a day of what used to be runways 8R, 8L, 26R and 26L on Stapleton's southern edge.

The job begins with a truck mounted with a "guillotine breaker," a 12,000-pound metal blade that rises five feet and then pounds down on the concrete, fracturing the material every few inches.

Picking up the pieces

Backhoes then break up the concrete, and loaders pick up the pieces to be hauled away in trucks that carry 21-ton loads.

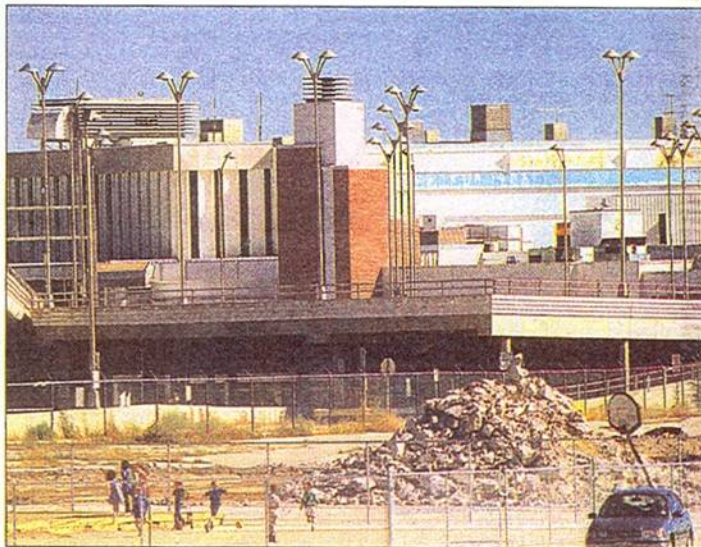
A typical section of runway will have 15 inches of concrete on top of 12 inches of cement-treated base, which in turn rests atop 8 inches of untreated base.

"It's kind of like peeling a big onion," Wachal said.

The demolished material is taken across Interstate 70 to Stapleton's north side, where Recycled Materials' processing plant crushes the concrete chunks and sorts the residue into varying sizes of stone, gravel and sand suitable for new construction jobs.

Much of the aggregate is being used for concrete paving at Denver International Airport, Wachal said.

Recycled Materials sells the



The runways near the former terminal at Stapleton Airport lie partly demolished behind Odyssey School's fenced-in play yard, above. At left, workers pound up and remove concrete from runways. The mass of concrete used to build the airport's runways and aprons is enough to fill Mile High Stadium six times.

Lyn Alweis
The Denver Post

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Stapleton begins demolition work

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material for prices ranging from \$4 to \$9.50 a ton.

Wachal said it's too early to determine if the unusual contract with Denver will be lucrative.

"I guess time will tell if we were fools or if we're brilliant," he said. Some of the concrete chunks have been used for retaining walls and hiking trails on Stapleton property.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal had once been considered a major buyer of the concrete rubble to use for keeping animals from burrowing into areas that have not been decontaminated.

Officials of Denver and Recycled Materials, however, said they have been unable to reach an agreement with the arsenal over the price to be paid for the material.

In the meantime, runway demolition is proceeding at a pace that will allow Forest City to begin

building as soon as it completes a development agreement — expected before the end of the year — with the city's Stapleton Development Corp.

Forest City anticipates the start of initial development by next spring, with the first new homes being completed in 2001.

In addition to 2,000 single- and multifamily residential units, the first phase of development will include an 80-acre "village center" with 200,000 square feet of commercial development anchored by a grocery store.

"We've tried to mesh our development cycle with the removal of the runways," said John Lehigh, executive vice president of Forest City. "At this point, it's looking pretty good."