

# Grease Recyclers Rejoice

By Tina Caparella

**S**it down and talk with anybody in the used kitchen grease recycling business and it won't be long before the conversation turns to grease theft. It's an age-old problem that seems to have plagued the industry since the beginning of grease collection, but even more so in the last few years due to the emerging biodiesel industry. To deter thefts, there have been many changes to the current system of collecting grease, ranging from adding lid locks and heavier screens to the standard plastic lids, to using heated tanks installed indoors. Grease collectors have also gone back to the original heavy steel lids or increasing the frequency of collection to empty containers before thieves can get to the product. While all of these methods can help, essentially they do nothing but keep the honest man out. Plastic

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lids and padlocks can be cut, lid locks can be pried off, and steel lids can be pried up.

According to David Hull, who handles sales for Onkens, Inc., a used kitchen grease container manufacturer since 1984, “All of our customers deal with it in one way or another.

The news media portrays grease as an unwanted waste that anyone can get for free to make low cost fuel, and most local police agencies see it as garbage, not knowing how to handle the complaints or prevention. In the end, the rendering company is left to remedy the problem of theft itself.”

It appears Onkens has come up with a solution. In 2008, the company received a request from one of its customers, Darling International, to design a “theft-proof lid.” The renderer wanted something that was strong enough to keep out thieves but easy to service. The current plastic lids wouldn't do and the old steel lids were too heavy for the collection drivers to take off and put back on without risking injury. Darling wanted something new, something innovative.

“We knew the lid would have to be steel but it needed to be something that stayed on the bin so the driver didn't have to remove a heavy, re-enforced lid,” said J.R. Onken, operations manager for Onkens and co-inventor of the lid. “We decided to build on an old idea, the folding lid. We had to make some design changes to make it easier to dump, which included narrowing the lid and adding a one-inch strap steel to prevent the edges from being pried up. We also added a one-inch on-center, welded-in screen to prevent anyone from pumping the

grease out. This way the customer isn't required to lock up the pour area.”

There were many updates to the lid but one of the major changes was the addition of the locking center and corners. Onkens added a locking mechanism to the center of the fold lid to prevent the hinge joint from being pried up and also added drop-in pins on the front two corners that are secured by a “hockey puck” style lock. These locks are designed to prevent access to the hasp and keep it from being cut. This corner locking system is the main idea behind the current patent application the company has filed on the lid. With these design changes, Onkens was able to provide a theft-proof design and still have the ease of service that the customer wanted.

After some feedback from customers, Onkens has made a few minor changes to end up with the current design without affecting the parameters of the original patent application. Presently, Onkens holds 20 patents dealing with recycled kitchen grease and recycled grease collection.

The lid, constructed of 14 gauge steel, is secured at the back by a heavy duty hinge and can be unlocked at the front and folded half way back to pump, or unlocked fully for dumping, all without ever removing the lid. Some minor fabrication work is required for installation, which can be done on new or existing containers and performed in the field if necessary. Once installed, the lid makes an Onkens or any other manufacturer's 300 gallon grease container theft proof.

## Word from the Field

Although the new theft-proof lid has only been available since the beginning of this year, those that have been using it are “very happy grease guys,” so said Bob Soracco of American By-Products Recyclers, LLC, in Newark, NJ.

Family owned and operated since 1914, American By-Products has seen a dramatic increase in grease theft over the last year or two. The company uses a combination of containers and 55 gallon drums to collect used kitchen grease from various customers, primarily in the city. Soracco said 20 years ago they might have a drum or two stolen or emptied, but now it's “worse than ever.” About three months ago, American By-Products replaced plastic lids with the new theft-proof lids on about half of their existing Onkens containers and began switching out some drums for containers with the new lids. The result?

“Now the grease is there when the driver arrives to pump it out,” Soracco beamed. “I am pleased.” He added the lids



# in a new theft-proof lid

are easy for the drivers to use and believes they also act as a deterrent for thieves trying to break into the containers. In addition, the company has placed a "\$500 reward" sticker on the containers in an effort to further prevent thefts, and will eventually replace all of their containers' plastic lids with the new theft-proof lids.

Perhaps the happiest grease guy is George Dewitt Guttridge, grease procurement manager at Darling International's Newark, NJ, facility, which services thousands of accounts in multiple states.

"Three years ago, we had low finished product values, but with the recent increase in yellow grease market values, the industry has seen an increase in thievery," Guttridge explained. Darling has always employed innovative methods of preventing thefts, including high-security, expensive locks, but the thieves always found a way to get around them.

In an effort to stop the thefts, Guttridge has had to take on the role of private investigator, but when trying to prosecute grease thieves in large metropolitan areas, the courts aren't much help because they have much larger problems than grease theft. In addition to stealing the grease, individuals were destroying containers, resulting in an additional replacement cost of lids and screens. When Darling's National Account Center's

customers began asking what action the company was taking to avoid the recent theft problem, Guttridge decided to take his decades of experience and feedback from his drivers and along with John Latino, transportation manager of Darling's retail region, approached Onkens about their ideas for a theft-proof lid. After several discussions and visits to the Newark plant by Hull and Onken, the new theft-proof lid concept was born, and Darling immediately tried the new retrofitted containers in areas that were most susceptible to grease theft. Again, the result?

"Not one of the retrofitted tanks has been vandalized in six months," reported Guttridge, who has just ordered an additional 100 lids. Darling has always offered monetary rewards to the supplier for the conviction of grease thieves, but has not had to pay a reward to any of the accounts that have the new retrofitted containers installed. According to Guttridge, the new lids are so strong they can't even be pried open with hydraulics. New lids are usually installed when tanks are brought into the company's facility for cleaning.

Onkens and Darling are excited to share how this new technology is stopping grease theft.

"If the industry uses these methods employed by Darling, the word is going to get out, and the thefts are going to stop," stated Guttridge. **R**

*The theft-proof lid has been designed so collection drivers don't need to remove the heavy steel lid.*

