

WASTE CONNECTIONS INC/DE
Form 10-K
February 10, 2009

UNITED STATES

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20549

FORM 10-K

(Mark One)

ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the fiscal year ended December 31, 2008

OR

TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

For the transition period from _____ to _____

Commission File No. 1-31507

WASTE CONNECTIONS, INC.

(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

Delaware
(State or other jurisdiction
of incorporation or organization)

94-3283464
(I.R.S. Employer Identification No.)

35 Iron Point Circle
Suite 200
Folsom, California
(Address of principal executive offices)

95630
(Zip Code)

(916) 608-8200
(Registrant's telephone number, including area code)

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(b) of the Act:
Common Stock, par value \$.01 per share
(Title of each class) New York Stock Exchange
(Name of each exchange on which registered)

Securities registered pursuant to Section 12(g) of the Act: None

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act.

Yes No

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Act.

Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days.

Yes No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K.

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer, or a smaller reporting company. See the definitions of "large accelerated filer," "accelerated filer" and "smaller reporting company" in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act. (Check one):

Large accelerated filer Accelerated filer Non-accelerated filer Smaller reporting company

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act).

Yes No

As of June 30, 2008, the aggregate market value of voting and non-voting common stock held by non-affiliates of the registrant, based on the closing sales price for the registrant's common stock, as reported on the New York Stock Exchange, was \$2,102,628,497.

Number of shares of common stock outstanding as of January 23, 2009: 79,856,318

DOCUMENTS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE

Portions of the registrant's definitive Proxy Statement for the 2009 Annual Meeting of Stockholders are incorporated by reference into Part III hereof.

WASTE CONNECTIONS, INC.
ANNUAL REPORT ON FORM 10-K

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PART I

ITEM 1. BUSINESS

Our Company

Waste Connections, Inc. is an integrated solid waste services company that provides solid waste collection, transfer, disposal and recycling services in mostly secondary markets in the Western and Southern U.S. We serve approximately 1.8 million residential, commercial and industrial customers from operations in 23 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. As of December 31, 2008, we owned or operated a network of 135 solid waste collection operations, 52 transfer stations, 34 recycling operations and 37 active landfills. In addition, we provided intermodal services for the rail haul movement of solid waste and cargo containers in the Pacific Northwest through a network of six intermodal facilities.

We are a leading provider of solid waste services in most of our markets. We have focused on secondary markets mostly in the Western and Southern U.S. because we believe that those areas offer:

- opportunities to enter into exclusive arrangements;
- more competitive barriers to entry;
- less competition from larger solid waste services companies;
- projected economic and population growth rates that will contribute to the growth of our business; and
- a number of independent solid waste services companies suitable for acquisition.

Our senior management team has extensive experience in operating, acquiring and integrating solid waste services businesses, and we intend to continue to focus our efforts on balancing internal and acquisition-based growth. We anticipate that a part of our future growth will come from acquiring additional solid waste collection, transfer and disposal businesses and, therefore, we expect that additional acquisitions could continue to affect period-to-period comparisons of our operating results.

Waste Connections, Inc. is a Delaware corporation organized in 1997.

Our Operating Strategy

Our operating strategy seeks to improve financial returns and deliver superior stockholder value creation within the solid waste industry. We seek to avoid highly competitive, large urban markets and instead target markets where we can provide non-integrated or integrated solid waste services under exclusive arrangements or where we can operate on an integrated basis while attaining high market share. The key components of our operating strategy, which are tailored to the competitive and regulatory factors that affect our markets, are as follows:

Control the Waste Stream. In markets where waste collection services are provided under exclusive arrangements, or where waste disposal is municipally funded or available at multiple municipal sources, we believe that controlling the waste stream by providing collection services is often more important to our profitability and growth than owning or operating landfills. In addition, contracts in some Western U.S. markets dictate the disposal facility to be used. The large size of many western states increases the cost of interstate and long haul disposal, heightening the effects of regulations that direct waste disposal, which may make it more difficult for a landfill to obtain the disposal volume necessary to operate profitably. In markets with these characteristics, we believe that landfill ownership or vertical integration is not as critical to our success.

Provide Vertically Integrated Services. In markets where we believe that owning landfills is a strategic element to a collection operation because of competitive and regulatory factors, we generally focus on providing integrated services, from collection through disposal of solid waste in landfills that we own or operate.

Manage on a Decentralized Basis. We manage our operations on a decentralized basis. This places decision-making authority close to the customer, enabling us to identify and address customers' needs quickly in a cost-effective manner. We believe that decentralization provides a low-overhead, highly efficient operational structure that allows us to expand into geographically contiguous markets and operate in relatively small communities that larger competitors may not find attractive. We believe that this structure gives us a strategic competitive advantage, given the relatively rural nature of much of the Western and Southern U.S., and makes us an attractive buyer to many potential acquisition candidates.

We currently deliver our services from approximately 147 operating locations grouped into three regions. We manage and evaluate our business on the basis of the regions' geographic characteristics, interstate waste flow, revenue base, employee base, regulatory structure and acquisition opportunities. Each region has a regional vice president and a regional controller, reporting directly to our corporate management. These regional officers are responsible for operations and accounting in their regions and supervise their regional staff.

Each operating location has a district or site manager who has autonomous service and decision-making authority for his or her operations and is responsible for maintaining service quality, promoting safety, implementing marketing programs and overseeing day-to-day operations, including contract administration. Local managers also help identify acquisition candidates and are responsible for integrating acquired businesses into our operations and obtaining the permits and other governmental approvals required for us to operate.

Implement Operating Standards. We develop company-wide operating standards, which are tailored for each of our markets based on industry norms and local conditions. We implement cost controls and employee training and safety procedures and establish a sales and marketing plan for each market. By internalizing the waste stream of acquired operations, we can further increase operating efficiencies and improve capital utilization. We use a wide-area information system network, implement financial controls and consolidate certain accounting, personnel and customer service functions. While regional and district management operate with a high degree of autonomy, our senior officers monitor regional and district operations and require adherence to our accounting, purchasing, marketing and internal control policies, particularly with respect to financial matters. Our executive officers regularly review the performance of regional officers, district managers and operations. We believe we can improve the profitability of existing and newly acquired operations by establishing operating standards, closely monitoring performance and streamlining certain administrative functions.

Our Growth Strategy

We tailor the components of our growth strategy to the markets in which we operate and into which we hope to expand.

Obtain Additional Exclusive Arrangements. Our operations include market areas where we have exclusive arrangements, including franchise agreements, municipal contracts and governmental certificates, under which we are the exclusive service provider for a specified market. These exclusive rights and contractual arrangements create a barrier to entry that is usually obtained through the acquisition of a company with such exclusive rights or contractual arrangements or by a competitive bid.

We devote significant resources to securing additional franchise agreements and municipal contracts through competitive bidding and by acquiring other companies. In bidding for franchises and municipal contracts and evaluating acquisition candidates holding governmental certificates, our management team draws on its experience in the waste industry and knowledge of local service areas in existing and target markets. Our district management and sales and marketing personnel maintain relationships with local governmental officials within their service areas, maintain, renew and renegotiate existing franchise agreements and municipal contracts, and secure additional agreements and contracts while targeting acceptable financial returns. Our sales and marketing personnel also expand our presence into areas adjacent to or contiguous with our existing markets, and market additional services to existing customers. We believe our ability to offer comprehensive rail haul disposal services in the Pacific Northwest improves our competitive position in bidding for such contracts in that region.

Generate Internal Growth. To generate continued internal revenue growth, our district management and sales and marketing personnel focus on increasing market penetration in our current and adjacent markets, soliciting new residential, commercial and industrial customers in markets where such customers have the option to choose a

particular waste collection service and marketing upgraded or additional services (such as compaction or automated collection) to existing customers. We also focus on raising prices and instituting surcharges, when appropriate, to offset cost increases. Where possible, we intend to leverage our franchise-based platforms to expand our customer base beyond our exclusive market territories. As customers are added in existing markets, our revenue per routed truck increases, which generally increases our collection efficiencies and profitability. In markets in which we have exclusive contracts, franchises and certificates, we expect internal volume growth generally to track population and business growth.

Expand Through Acquisitions. We intend to expand the scope of our operations by continuing to acquire solid waste companies in new markets and in existing or adjacent markets that are combined with or “tucked in” to our existing operations. We focus our acquisition efforts on markets that we believe provide significant growth opportunities for a well-capitalized market entrant and where we can create economic and operational barriers to entry by new competitors. This focus typically highlights markets in which we can either: (1) provide waste collection services under franchises, exclusive contracts or other arrangements; or (2) gain a leading market position and provide vertically integrated collection and disposal services. We believe that our experienced management, decentralized operating strategy, financial strength, size and public company status make us an attractive buyer to certain solid waste collection and disposal acquisition candidates. We have developed an acquisition discipline based on a set of financial, market and management criteria to evaluate opportunities. Once an acquisition is closed, we seek to integrate it while minimizing disruption to the ongoing operations of both Waste Connections and the acquired business.

In new markets, we often use an initial acquisition as an operating base and seek to strengthen the acquired operation's presence in that market by providing additional services, adding new customers and making "tuck-in" acquisitions of other solid waste companies in that market or adjacent markets. We believe that many suitable "tuck-in" acquisition opportunities exist within our current and targeted market areas that may provide us with opportunities to increase our market share and route density.

The U.S. solid waste services industry experienced significant consolidation during the 1990s. The consolidation trend has continued, most notably with the recent merger between Republic Services, Inc. and Allied Waste Industries, Inc. The solid waste services industry remains regional in nature with acquisition opportunities available in selected markets. Some of the remaining independent landfill and collection operators lack the capital resources, management skills and/or technical expertise necessary to comply with stringent environmental and other governmental regulations and compete with larger, more efficient, integrated operators. In addition, many of the remaining independent operators may wish to sell their businesses to achieve liquidity in their personal finances or as part of their estate planning. Due to the prevalence of exclusive arrangements, we believe the Western markets contain the largest and most attractive number of acquisition opportunities. In addition, the recent merger between Republic Services, Inc. and Allied Waste Industries, Inc. will result in additional acquisition opportunities through governmentally-mandated divestitures. For example, on February 6, 2009, we entered into an Asset Purchase Agreement with Republic Services in connection with the sale of certain assets Republic Services was required to divest pursuant to a court order issued in connection with the merger between Republic Services and Allied. For additional information, see Part II, Item 9B of this Annual Report on Form 10-K.

During the year ended December 31, 2007, we completed 15 acquisitions, none of which individually or in the aggregate accounted for greater than 10% of our total assets. On November 3, 2008, we completed the acquisition of all of the outstanding capital stock of Harold LeMay Enterprises, Incorporated for an aggregate purchase price of \$210.9 million, which amount includes the assumption of \$18.3 million of indebtedness. During the year ended December 31, 2008, we completed 14 other acquisitions and acquired the remaining 49% interest in Pierce County Recycling, Composting and Disposal, LLC and Pierce County Landfill Management, Inc. ("PCRCD"), none of which individually or in the aggregate accounted for greater than 10% of our total assets.

SOLID WASTE SERVICES

Residential, Commercial and Industrial Collection Services

We serve approximately 1.8 million residential, commercial and industrial customers from operations in 23 states. Our services are generally provided under one of the following arrangements: (1) governmental certificates; (2) exclusive franchise agreements; (3) exclusive municipal contracts; (4) residential subscriptions; (5) residential contracts; or (6) commercial and industrial service agreements.

Governmental certificates, exclusive franchise agreements and exclusive municipal contracts grant us rights to provide services within specified areas at established rates. Governmental certificates, or G Certificates, are unique to the State of Washington. The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, or the WUTC, awards G Certificates to solid waste collection service providers in unincorporated areas and electing municipalities. These certificates typically grant the holder the exclusive and perpetual right to provide specific residential, commercial and/or industrial waste services in a defined territory at specified rates subject to divestiture and/or cancellation by the WUTC on specified limited grounds. Franchise agreements typically provide an exclusive period of seven years or longer for a specified territory. These arrangements specify a broad range of services to be provided, establish rates for the services and often give the service provider a right of first refusal to extend the term of the agreement. Municipal contracts typically provide a shorter service period and a more limited scope of services than franchise agreements and generally require competitive bidding at the end of the contract term. We do not expect that the loss of any current

contracts in negotiation for renewal or contracts likely to terminate in 2009 will have a material adverse effect on our revenues or cash flows. No single contract or customer accounted for more than 5% of our total revenues for the years ended December 31, 2007 and 2008.

We provide residential solid waste services, other than those we perform under exclusive arrangements, under contracts with homeowners' associations, apartment owners, mobile home park operators or on a subscription basis with individual households. We set base residential fees on a contract basis primarily based on route density, the frequency and level of service, the distance to the disposal or processing facility, weight and type of waste collected, type of equipment and containers furnished, the cost of disposal or processing and prices charged by competitors in that market for similar services. Collection fees are paid either by the municipalities from tax revenues or directly by the residents receiving the services. We provide 20- to 96-gallon carts to residential customers.

We provide commercial and industrial services, other than those we perform under exclusive arrangements, under customer service agreements generally ranging from one to five years in duration. We determine fees under these agreements by such factors as collection frequency, level of service, route density, the type, volume and weight of the waste collected, type of equipment and containers furnished, the distance to the disposal or processing facility, the cost of disposal or processing and prices charged by competitors in our collection markets for similar services. Collection of larger volumes of commercial and industrial waste streams generally helps improve our operating efficiencies, and consolidation of these volumes allows us to negotiate more favorable disposal prices. We provide one- to ten-cubic yard containers to commercial customers and ten- to 50-cubic yard containers to industrial customers. For an additional fee, we install on the premises of large volume customers stationary compactors that compact waste prior to collection.

Landfill Disposal Services

We own solid waste landfills to achieve vertical integration in markets where the economic and regulatory environments make landfill ownership attractive. Where our operations are vertically integrated, we eliminate third-party disposal costs and generally realize higher margins and stronger operating cash flows. The fees charged at disposal facilities, which are known as tipping fees, are based on market factors and take into account the type and weight or volume of solid waste deposited and the type and size of the vehicles used to transport waste.

Our landfill facilities consisted of the following at December 31, 2008:

Owned and operated landfills	27
Operated landfills under limited-term operating agreements	7
Operated landfills under life-of-site agreements	3
	37

We own landfills in California, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee and Washington. In addition, we operate, but do not own, landfills in California, Mississippi, Nebraska and New Mexico. With the exception of two landfills located in Mississippi and Colorado, which only accept construction and demolition waste, all landfills that we own or operate are municipal solid waste landfills.

Under landfill operating agreements, the owner of the property, generally a municipality, usually owns the permit and we operate the landfill for a contracted term, which may be the life of the landfill. Where the contracted term is not the life of the landfill, the property owner is generally responsible for final capping, closure and post-closure obligations. We are responsible for all final capping, closure and post-closure obligations at the three operated landfills for which we have life-of-site agreements. Our operating contracts for which the contracted term is less than the life of the landfill have expiration dates from 2009 to 2018. One contract expiring in 2009 represents estimated annual revenues of \$2.4 million and is not expected to be renewed. For all other operated landfills under limited-term operating agreements, we intend to seek renewal of these contracts prior to, or upon, their expiration.

Based on remaining permitted capacity as of December 31, 2008, and projected annual disposal volumes, the average remaining landfill life for our owned and operated landfills and landfills operated, but not owned, under life-of-site agreements, is estimated to be approximately 48 years. Many of our existing landfills have the potential for expanded disposal capacity beyond the amount currently permitted. We monitor the available permitted in-place disposal capacity of our landfills on an ongoing basis and evaluate whether to seek capacity expansion. In making this evaluation, we consider various factors, including the following:

whether the land where the expansion is being sought is contiguous to the current disposal site, and whether we either own it or the property is under an option, purchase, operating or other similar agreement;

whether total development costs, final capping costs, and closure/post-closure costs have been determined;

whether internal personnel have performed a financial analysis of the proposed expansion site and have determined that it has a positive financial and operational impact;

whether internal personnel or external consultants are actively working to obtain the necessary approvals to obtain the landfill expansion permit; and

whether we consider it probable that we will achieve the expansion (for a pursued expansion to be considered probable, there must be no significant known technical, legal, community, business or political restrictions or similar issues existing that could impair the success of the expansion).

We also regularly consider whether it is advisable, in light of changing market conditions and/or regulatory requirements, to seek to expand or change the permitted waste streams or to seek other permit modifications. We are currently seeking to expand permitted capacity at five of our landfills for which we consider expansions to be probable. Although we cannot be certain that all future expansions will be permitted as designed, the average remaining landfill life for our owned and operated landfills and landfills operated, but not owned, under life-of-site agreements is estimated to be approximately 53 years when considering remaining permitted capacity, probable expansion capacity and projected annual disposal volume.

The following table reflects estimated landfill capacity and airspace changes, as measured in tons, for owned and operated landfills and landfills operated, but not owned, under life-of-site agreements (in thousands):

2007	2008
Permitted	