



# Steady Growth



*Action Resources CEO Dean Flint*

*By Ford Boswell*

HANCEVILLE, Ala.

Several years ago, Action Resources, Inc., based here since 1995, shifted its focus from providing environmental cleanup and remediation services to hauling hazardous materials and never looked back. Today, lead by CEO Dean Flint and an experienced team of professionals, the com-

pany is poised for expansion.

Despite a soft economy and rising operational costs such as fuel, tires and insurance, company officials report an annual revenue increase of more than 34 percent between July 2007 and July 2008. Meanwhile, the company also increased its over-the-road fleet by more than 35 trucks to reach 125, and recently added a terminal in Houston, a hotbed for hazmat hauling.

Flint, who was hired to lead the firm

after a group of investors acquired the company in 2006, is extremely excited about the company growth potential. "Honestly, we've been unaffected on the top line by the recent downturn," he says. "We'd like to see the company grow to 500 trucks within five years. We pride ourselves on delivering outstanding customer service – we believe it's a large part of our overall success."

But other positive factors, according to Flint, include a high quality, tenured driver



*Hazmat handling and hauling requires adherence to strict state and federal safety and environmental guidelines.*

force, an experienced management staff, diversified business model, excellent maintenance and safety programs, and relatively short haul routes.

Today, the trucking side performs 70 percent hazardous waste hauling and 30 percent specialty liquid chemical hauling, coming from industrial manufacturing and chemical facilities near the company's four terminals including, Hanceville, Gadsden, Mobile and Houston.

The Houston terminal was added last year to meet growing demand. Flint explains that Texas is the largest producer of hazardous waste in the U.S. In fact, by some estimates, the Lone Star State produces four times more hazardous waste than the next largest state. The Houston area alone produces 37 percent of all hazardous waste in Texas. "It is a huge market for us to break into," Flint says. "Many of our existing customers do a lot of business there, and for them it's a tough market in terms of quality (transporter) capacity. They were struggling and asked us to set up a terminal there."

Meanwhile, the company's environmental cleanup side, Action Environmental, is still an integral, growing part of the business. The

company provides emergency response fuel and chemical spill control and cleanup services, underground tank removal and repair, and additional turn key environmental services.

## Company Background

Stan Wood and John Milledge started the company in 1995. Over time, they began to shift focus from the environment side to hauling hazmat waste and chemicals, with Wood managing the trucking side and Milledge handling the environmental.

The new focus came unexpectedly when a local poultry processing plant was damaged by a fire and had to quickly ship several loads of valuable raw materials across the country. Action Resources employees hauled what they could and enlisted enough independent contractors to complete the job on schedule. The owners of the plant told Wood and Milledge that they could have their entire trucking business – today that company remains one of the operation's largest contracts.

Over the next 10 years the company grew steadily, adding capacity with demand, but by 2005, things leveled off, and the

partners knew that a more experienced leader was needed to take the company to the next level. The owners opted to sell, and the company is now owned by a small group of investors who bought the company in 2006. Wood eventually retired and Milledge stayed on to run the company's successful environmental business. With the transfer of ownership complete, the company's board of directors began a search to find the right leader. That search ended with Flint, a former Army officer who spent many years with one of the nation's largest trucking firms, Schneider National, Inc. of Green Bay, Wis.

## Proven Leader

According to Flint, the owners were looking for a proven leader with a strong transportation background who could help triple or even quadruple the company through acquisitions and organic growth.

Flint, a former Army helicopter pilot who served eight months in Iraq during the First Gulf War, had more than 14 years in trucking management before taking the

*Continued on page 6*



*The company offers an extensive mix of specialty trailers for hazmat hauling. Above, a dumpster is loaded onto a double-bunk, roll-off chassis.*

reins at Action Resources.

After high school he attended the United States Military Academy (West Point) and eventually trained to fly helicopters. "That was something I always wanted to do – a sort of lifelong dream of mine," he says.

As his career with the Army came to an end, Flint began thinking of his next move. "The truth is, if someone had told me when I was in the Army that I would make a career in trucking, I would have thought they were smoking something," he says.

But after attending a two-day job fair to match officers leaving the military with hiring companies, Flint was extremely impressed with Schneider (The 70-year-old company is routinely ranked among the nation's top providers of transportation, logistics and related services). "I interviewed with probably 18 companies that weekend, but I was most impressed with Schneider National."

He accepted a position managing a 70-employee maintenance facility at the company's terminal in Charlotte, NC. In the 14 years he worked with the company, Flint worked his way through the ranks to eventually become a Vice President of Operations for the company's Intermodal Division. "Schneider is a great company to work for – they really do a lot to develop

their people," he says. "I have only good things to say about that company. In fact, I wasn't looking to leave when I was approached with the opportunity here."

In early 2006, a former colleague gave Flint's name to a job placement recruiter who was working for Action Resources' new owners. Flint admits he wasn't sure he even wanted to make a career change. But the more he spoke with the recruiter, the more he realized this was an opportunity to join a company with an outstanding future ahead

of it. "When I saw the wealth of experience and potential for growth that this company has to offer, I knew I wanted to be a part of it," he recalls.

## Experience Matters

Still, leaving a good job with a solid company was a major step for Flint, but it didn't take long for him to realize that this small carrier was in the hands of a very capable

*Continued on page 8*



*ATA Workers' Comp Fund recently honored Action Resources for having the most improved loss ratio of any of its members in 2007. Above, Fund safety engineer Harold Smith (center) presents an award to the Action Resources safety team. Appearing left to right with Smith are Carolyn Payne, Greg Calhoun and Doug Carothers.*

management team. With the exception of one (who Flint hired shortly after taking over as CEO) all current managers have been with the company for many years.

“One of the neat things about this company is that while I have 14 years in the industry, all of the managers here have about 10 more than I do,” Flint says. “That was one of the things that attracted me most to this company. Having that much experience at the top levels of management is an incredible advantage for someone in my position. It’s given me the confidence necessary to do what the board of directors originally charged me with, which is triple or even quadruple the company within five years.”

To achieve this, the company has been more aggressive and localized in its sales strategies. Terminal managers handle sales, customer service and dispatch. This is done to create a tailored approach to marketing each area the company services. John Milledge, Vice President & General Manager of the Environmental business oversees all aspects of its operation. Mark Mudryk, Vice President & General Manager, oversees the entire trucking operation, but manages day-to-day operations at the Hanceville terminal. Other terminal managers are Jerry Busby (Mobile) and Calvin Lewis (Houston). Other key employees are Vice President of Safety Greg Calhoun and Chief Financial Officer Troy Pritchett.

## Controlling Risk, Lowering Costs

As Flint rounds out his second year of managing the company, he says things are on the right track or at the very least moving in the right direction. Employees have also readily accepted new programs that are helping the company achieve its goals more quickly.

Company officials have even implemented fuel and safety incentive programs that have challenged employees to be more attentive to quelling waste.

For instance, last spring, the Alabama Trucking Association Workers’ Compensation Self Insurers Fund named the company the most improved fund

member in terms of loss ratio. According to Fund Safety Engineer Rick Hunter, Action Resources earned a loss ratio of 3.59 percent over the last three years. “That’s just an incredible number — most of our fund members average about 40 percent,” Hunter said

Hunter explains that after experiencing a bad year in 2005, Action Resources managers refocused the safety program and stepped up their training efforts. “Once they put their plan into action, they really began to see results,” he says. “They are required by law to do a lot of things with their safety programs because of the type of hauling they do, so a good foundation was



*An extensive maintenance program and other fuel-saving initiatives have helped the fleet increase fuel efficiency by 8 percent.*

already there. But today, when I visit one of their facilities, I can see just how much pride the management staff and the employees have in their program. They have created a culture of safety, and I think that is why we’re seeing things payoff for them. The staff there has done a magnificent job in stepping up the program.”

The company offers bonuses and awards for no accidents. The employees and drivers love the extra money and the friendly competition it creates. Management loves the savings the company is realizing in insurance costs.

All drivers must be experienced and meet state and federal requirements to haul hazmat. New hires attend no less than 40 hours of hazmat hauling training before they touch a company truck. Once on the road full time, they are required by the company to attend quarterly training sessions and safety meetings in addition to using all required personal protective equipment (PPE).

Indeed, the stricter requirements make

recruiting new drivers difficult, but the company keeps a full-time recruiter on staff to meet demand. “We currently have enough drivers for our trucks,” Flint says. “I wish we could find more independent contractors, but a lot of them are parking their trucks these days.”

Meanwhile, earlier this year, company officials wanted to offset rising fuel cost. They implemented a clever incentive plan for drivers who achieved better fuel economy. Every driver who increases his or her average miles-per-gallon (MPG) rate by 10 percent or more, or averages better than 6 MPG, they will receive a \$500 bonus at the end of the year. Each driver who earns that bonus will then have his or her name added to a raffle for a new, nicely equipped Ford F150 pickup truck.

“It’s going to cost us a little up front, but this program is saving us way more than that truck will cost us,” he says. “Initially, drivers were kind of skeptical, but they are not any more, and it’s really going to get crazy around here when we park the pickup truck out front.”

As of mid-July, more than 60 drivers were still eligible for the truck, according to Flint. “It’s saving us money; it’s a lot of fun; and it’s making our drivers feel good about being here,”

Flint says. “I can’t wait to personally hand out those checks and hand over the keys to that truck.”

Other fuel saving initiatives implemented over the last year include, dropping truck speeds by 4 MPH, running newer, small trucks, and properly maintaining equipment. All of these things have helped the company increase its fleet MPG average by 8 percent so far this year.

## Looking Ahead

Flint says that he’d like to see the company continue its current growth trend. “I’d love to see us grow and continue to provide a strong place of employment where people can feel good about coming to work,” he says. “I’d like to see us add a terminal every couple of years, and maybe find the right company to buy to add to the team. As long as we’re growing, and people feel good about what we’re doing, then we’re doing the right thing.”