

Simple invention keeps trash, alligators from storm drains

Originally published July 10, 2006

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URBANA — Almost a decade ago, Billy Mossburg, an excavator, found a way to make his job easier. Since then, his invention has helped communities across the country.

To keep trash from clogging storm drains in streets, parking lots and gas stations, he invented a device that acts like a sink strainer, only it's bigger and bolts onto a curb by the gutter.

"As far as trash goes, the biggest polluter is fast food," Mr. Mossburg, 63, said. "Paper and cups clog things up, then you have to get a truck and clear it."

In 1998, the brainstorm came to him — a piece of aluminum with holes in it.

"I manufacture it locally from a private manufacturer," Mr. Mossburg said, holding up an 8-inch model. It looked like an oversized door hinge with holes down the center.

"I field-tested the invention all over California and Florida," he said.

In 2001, a street superintendent in Ventura, Calif., expressed serious interest.

Mr. Mossburg recalled a funny conversation they had when he told the superintendent he was on his way to California.

The man wanted to know what flight he'd be on, Mr. Mossburg said. "I told him I'm coming in on a Super Duty 520, compliments of Frederick Motor Co. He said, 'You're driving?'"

The Super Duty did the job. When Mr. Mossburg arrived in his truck, he found out why the superintendent wanted to try his product.

"The tide pulls trash off the water, and it gets in the streets," Mr. Mossburg said.

The following year, a community in Cocoa Beach, Fla., found his invention was a perfect alligator blockade, he said. The alligators had sometimes slipped into town. Now they have to keep swimming.

A third variation of his product used a sock-like attachment to help a Shell gas station strain impurities out of gas.

Ten years ago Mr. Mossburg's company, National Inlet Protection Inc., became the responsibility of his son, Bill Mossburg III.

"As long as my boy keeps sending me grocery money, I know I did the right thing," Mr. Mossburg said.



Photo by Sam Yu

Bill Mossburg, III, president of National Inlet Protection, is shown recently with the company's product, a device that keeps debris from being swept into storm drains from curbside drains. This one is installed in Kentlands in Montgomery County.

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