

[NATURE'S CALLING]

COMPOSTING TOILETS TREAT WASTE **NATURALLY,** WITHOUT ODOR OR ELECTRICITY

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You've got a rustic vacation property and need an easy, quick way to install a bathroom. You've got a remote location without electric or water and need to put in a toilet. Or you're looking for an ecologically-friendly way to put in a privy.

The solution: a composting toilet.

"Our oldest client base is people with a vacation property or secondary structure," said Thom Harris of Sun-Mar Corporation, which has been marketing several lines of composting toilets for more than three decades.

The self-contained composting toilet units also offers a low-cost alternative for properties whose septic systems have failed and whose owners can't afford — or don't want — to install an expensive new system. Some of the units are portable, and can easily be moved to other locations.

Harris pointed out that the Biloxi, Miss. police department bought composting toilets to cope with the situation after Hurricane Katrina hit. They've also been popular with those who want to live in a more ecologically-sound household.

Composting toilets work on the basic system of decomposition. It's the same process that converts animal droppings into valuable nutrients for vegetation on the forest floor.

Inside the self-contained toilet, the solid waste is trapped within the unit, and the natural process of aerobic decomposition breaks down the waste into harmless compost.

"There's no odor with these systems," Harris said. "Yes, the waste is housed in the unit, but the process of decomposi-

tion is aerobic, so it produces no gases."

They require emptying of about "a few shopping bags' worth" of compost once a year for a seasonal property, or every two to three months for full-time residential use. The compost can be used for the garden.

Most of the composting toilets consume no electricity (the units that do only use a only couple light bulbs' worth) and use no water (the ones that do use only a pint per flush).

They also eliminate any pollution of the ground water, or the dumping of bacteria-laden refuse into bodies of water.

"According to EPA statistics, 60 percent of septic systems in the U.S. are ground water polluters," Harris said.

Harris added that a growing market for Sun-Mar's composting toilets is the residential market, especially through the growth of so-called "green communities" based on more ecologically-sound building and living. Many of these are built off the grid.

Sun-Mar was founded 30 years ago by Hardy Sundberg, who had developed the world's first self-contained composting toilet in 1971. A Sundberg family member still leads the research and development at Sun-Mar. The Ontario, Canada-based company now has 23 different models of composting toilets.

The price for Sun-Mar's composting toilets ranges from \$1,300 for a non-electric up to \$2,200 for Sun-Mar's most sophisticated residential model. The units are made primarily of fiberglass and sturdy, non-corroding plastic.

"And I've seen some out there that are 20 years old and still working," Harris said, "and our company's been around for 30 years." ■

