

J. W. BURRESS CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

For Wrecking Corporation of America, the tougher the demolition job, the better



Terry Anderson,
executive vice
president/COO

Photo of Terry
Anderson by Daniel
Rosenbaum/The
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Big demolition jobs are nothing new for Wrecking Corporation of America. The Alexandria, Virginia-based firm has been involved in many of the largest demolition jobs in the mid-Atlantic region since its incorporation in 1978.

Just in the last year or so, Wrecking Corp. has demolished two 14-story concrete office buildings at 1875 Pennsylvania Avenue; completed a large razing and selective demolition job at Columbia Hospital for Women; taken down a 600,000-square-foot, 12-story building at 1900 Pennsylvania Avenue; finished a 500,000-square-foot demolition of the old George Washington University Hospital; and removed 40 buildings at Lorton Prison.

But a project the company is currently involved in is large, even by Wrecking Corporation of America standards. It's the demolition of the former Washington Convention Center.

Convention Center demolition

"The old Convention Center occupied four city blocks, from 9th to 11th Street and from H to New

York Avenue Northwest," said Terry Anderson, executive vice president and COO of Wrecking Corp. "With 800,000 square feet under roof, it's probably the single largest building that's been taken down in Washington, D.C., in the last 20 years."

The sheer size of the old convention center was not the only aspect of the job that made it unique. It was also the first building to be imploded in the city since 1974.

"Although it wasn't very tall (only about 65 feet), the steel truss roof system with a lot of open space inside made it an ideal candidate for implosion," said Anderson. "If we hadn't imploded it, the project would have been extremely labor intensive and therefore would have cost more and taken much longer."

Wrecking Corp. started work in August 2004 with some preliminary cutting, capping of utilities and HAZMAT abatement. Prepping for demolition took a couple more months. The implosion itself occurred on December 18, 2004. The company has until the end of June 2005 to complete the cleanup.

"There's really no such thing as a 'typical job' anymore, so from that aspect, aside from the implosion, this wasn't all that unusual for us," said Anderson. "Now that it's on the ground, we'll separate and process the material and recycle everything that's recyclable, just like we do on every job. But because of its size, there's more material here to separate, process and recycle."

Full-service demolition contractor

Founded by Michael Amann, who still serves as president of the firm, Wrecking Corporation of America is a full-service demolition contractor that provides turnkey services for clients, whether that be total razing, selective demolition or historical salvaging. The company, which employs between 50 and 100 people depending on the workload, also does excavations for new buildings, typically at a site where it's done a demolition job.



Demolition of the former Washington Convention Center is just the latest high-profile job for Wrecking Corporation of America. Here, a Wrecking Corp. operator uses a Hitachi Zaxis 450 to sort and separate material.



Wrecking Corporation of America chose to implode the Convention Center, which occupied four city blocks near downtown D.C. To clean up the site, Wrecking Corp. has numerous Hitachi excavators from J.W. Burrell, including the Zaxis 270 and the Zaxis 450 with a LaBounty MSD 70R shear, shown above.



Wrecking Corp. owns 10 Hitachi excavators, including the EX330 shown here. "They're good, productive machines and an excellent value," said Terry Anderson of Wrecking Corp. "We've found that Hitachis are tough and hold up well in a difficult environment."

"We work throughout the mid-Atlantic, basically from Baltimore to the Tidewater region of Virginia," said Anderson. "Our specialty is urban work, in particular, downtown sites that are very vertical. There aren't many other demolition contractors in the area who can do these large, tight, challenging, high-rise and high-profile jobs, so we've made them our niche. We're probably the oldest demolition contractor in the region providing these services."

Experienced work force

To do those tough jobs efficiently requires a highly talented and experienced work force. Wrecking Corp. believes its employees are among the best in the business.

"We have a number of engineers on staff," said Anderson. "We also have probably at least half a dozen superintendents and project managers who've

been here 20 years or more. That kind of experience is invaluable in the demolition industry because there are no schools for the kind of services we provide. On-the-job training is as good as it gets and our guys have had that."

According to Anderson, experienced employees are important not only because they work quickly and efficiently, but also because they work safely.

"There are so many variables in demolition work, and so many different building technologies over the past hundred years or so, if you haven't seen them before, you may be lost on how to proceed. Worse yet, you may think you know what you're doing when you really don't have a clue. This can be a dangerous business and there's no place in it for contractors or workers who are sloppy and unsafe. At Wrecking Corp., safety is paramount and our experienced work

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Safety and productivity go hand-in-hand

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For more information on past jobs and the demolition services provided by Wrecking Corporation of America, visit www.wreckingcorp.com.

force helps us minimize potential jobsite safety problems.”

Equipment

Also helping to improve jobsite safety, as well as improve productivity throughout the industry, was a change in the equipment that demolition contractors use.

“In the 1960s and ’70s, we used big track loaders, a crane, rolls of steel cable and sledge hammers,” Anderson recalled. “I saw my first excavator doing demolition work in 1979. My initial thought was, ‘What’s it doing out there?’ But it didn’t take long before everybody was using excavators. Now, with specialized demolition attachments, they’ve definitely revolutionized the industry.”

Wrecking Corporation of America has 10 Hitachi excavators from J.W. Burress and sales representative Ron Meadows. The units include a Zaxis 600; four 450-size and four 330-size machines that are a combination of Zaxis and EX units; and a Zaxis 270. Wrecking Corp. also owns a Gradall 5200 from Burress.

“The vast majority of our excavator fleet is now Hitachi,” said Anderson. “They’re good, productive machines and an excellent value. Demolition work is tough on excavators. We’re always reaching up, pulling or pounding — all of which is much tougher on a machine than just digging. As a result, we don’t get the same life out of a machine as an earthmoving

contractor will get. We’ve found that Hitachis are tough and hold up well in our difficult environment.

“The Gradall has also been a wonderful addition for us,” he added. “We love it because it can get in tight with a big hammer on it, extend out, rotate and get any kind of angle we need. It’s also great for different excavation jobs we do.”

In addition to the quality of the equipment, Anderson has also been pleased with the service Wrecking Corp. has received from Meadows and J.W. Burress.

“We can’t afford downtime, so having good support from the dealer is critical. In our business, when something breaks, it’s not necessarily a normal wear part. We’ve got to have a dealer who’s going to have us back up and on the job within 24 hours, no matter what the problem is. I’ve got to give Burress credit. They have knowledgeable mechanics and a good supply of parts. They respond quickly and have always been able to get us back in business. Ron, our salesman, is very responsive. It’s been a good relationship.”

Wrecking Corp. also contracts with Burress to do all the company’s preventive maintenance services. “From our point of view, the advantage is not only that we know the oil and filters are going to get changed on time, but while he’s there, the Burress technician is also inspecting the machine and will give us an advance warning if a problem is developing.”

Inventory everywhere

As he looks to the future, Anderson is extremely optimistic about the demolition industry in general and Wrecking Corporation of America in particular. “When I drive around D.C., everything I see is inventory — and it’s all coming our way, eventually.”

In fact, it’s coming sooner and sooner. “It used to be we were only taking down buildings that were 50, 75 or 100 years old,” said Anderson. “But urban requirements today are different from what they used to be. People want stronger structures, more functionality and more parking. As a result, we’re now taking down buildings from the 1970s and ’80s. The Convention Center, for example, was only 22 years old. With these new demands and sky-high land values, that’s a trend we expect to continue.”

Despite the “growing inventory,” Anderson doesn’t expect or desire substantial growth for Wrecking Corporation of America. “We’ll grow, but only to the point where we’re comfortable with it. We’re much more interested in maintaining the high quality of our services and doing work profitably than we are in being the largest demolition contractor around.”



Wrecking Corporation of America imploded the Washington Convention Center on Dec. 18, 2004. Cleanup is expected to be complete by the end of June 2005.