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TOP STORY

Private landfill legislation

Future private landfills could be banned in NH under legislation

By Rick Green Sentinel Staff

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Germana

Courtesy



The N.H. Statehouse in Concord.

File photo by Hannah Schroeder / Sentinel Staff

N.H. Rep. Nicholas Germana of Keene didn't think he would become knowledgeable about landfills and garbage when he joined the Legislature in late 2022, but now finds himself something of an expert.

He says this is a topic with significance to the state's environment and public health as well as consumers' pocketbooks.

Germana, a Democrat who serves on the House Environment and Agriculture Committee, is a co-sponsor of a number of bills that would change how landfills operate and are regulated in New Hampshire. One would prohibit new ones from being owned privately and another would stop the issuance of permits to build them until 2031.

“One of the things we all value about New Hampshire is the natural beauty of the state,” he said in an interview Friday. “It is just antithetical to that value of cherishing our environment for the state to become the dumping ground for other states.”

Over the summer, Germana, a history professor at Keene State College, served on a legislative study committee that examined the permitting of landfills and out-of-state waste coming into New Hampshire.

The panel’s report noted that in 2020, there was 1.9 million tons of solid waste in New Hampshire, with about half coming from out-of-state sources.

“With everything we’ve learned about PFAS chemicals and just how ubiquitous they are, it is even more important that we are super careful about the amount and different kinds of material that we are landfilling because it’s a public health issue,” he said.

Germana was referring to a class of chemicals that have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s and have been tied to increased risk of some types of cancer and other health problems.

There is also a financial aspect to trash disposal versus recycling. If recycling could be increased, the costs to consumers of landfilling their garbage would be reduced, he said.

Many people simply throw most recyclable materials in the garbage can. The N.H. Department of Environmental Services estimates the average municipal recycling rate to be 26 percent.

Trash from Keene is trucked to a landfill in Rochester, 90 miles to the east.

Duncan Watson, Keene’s assistant public works director, said emerging technology holds the promise of eventually reducing this trash stream and improving recycling.

“We have to do better with how we discard our resources,” he said.

New machines and facilities are beginning to emerge that will be able to more effectively remove recyclable materials from trash, Watson said.

This technology could be employed by a state-owned landfill that the legislative study committee recommends be built. Also, such a state-of-the-art recycling plant would be able to take more types of plastics than are now accepted in most communities.

Keene takes plastics with the numbers one and two, Watson said. Other types of plastic aren't prevalent enough for most communities to recycle them. But if numerous towns and cities were feeding into one large recycling plant, there could be sufficient quantities of these other types of plastics to make it feasible to recycle them, he said.

Also, if the state owned the landfill it could choose not to take any out-of-state trash. Privately owned landfills always have the option of taking trash from other states.

The House Environment and Agriculture Committee will hold a public hearing Tuesday on House Bill 1620, which would block the issuance of permits for any new landfills until 2031.

On Wednesday, the panel will hold hearings on:

House Bill 1145, which would prohibit permits from being issued to private organizations that want to open new landfills in the state

House Bill 1632, which would prohibit future landfills from accepting more than 15 percent of their solid waste from out of state

House Bill 1221, which would specify that landfills have a regional impact and that public notice of proposals to open new ones must be made to communities within 20 miles of the proposed site

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