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# THE COURIER

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## Editorial

### *The asbestos lesson*

That we don't know – and can't control – what goes into the NCES landfill in Bethlehem has never been more dramatically illustrated than by the case of Mountain View owner Kevin Craffey.

For allowing an untold amount of asbestos to be illegally removed and disposed of during the renovation of his grand hotel in Whitefield, Craffey is now sitting behind bars in North Haverhill. Details about exactly how much asbestos was removed from the hotel may be revealed in the future trial of the job foreman. According to court records, the asbestos was disposed of at the NCES landfill.

We don't know how much Craffey saved by choosing to illegally remove and get rid of asbestos – a proven carcinogen considered hazardous waste. Legal handling and disposing of asbestos is expensive, but it's hard to imagine that it would have added a huge amount to what was already a \$20 million renovation project. So what about someone with a much smaller job – and budget – who wants to get rid of hazardous stuff cheaply? On jobs big and small, some people can't resist cutting corners. And that's what is truly scary about our local landfill: the owners and operators really don't know, and can't know, everything that gets dumped in it. If a grand hotel's worth of asbestos gets by, what else is making its way past the front gate? Two years ago it was American flags – hardly toxic waste, but you don't dump flags in landfills. They're supposed to be cremated.

Some residents have long suspected that dangerous substances get disposed of in Bethlehem, despite the landfill's being permitted by the state for nonhazardous waste only. For every high-profile case like flags and

asbestos that gets revealed, how much other stuff, like household cleansers (yes, they're hazardous), solvents and other chemicals, old motor oil, lead paint, pesticides, medical waste, or asbestos from someone's basement gets by? Wrapped in bags, sealed in boxes, or simply at the bottom of someone's pick up, dump truck, or commercial Dumpster, who would know? It's impossible to know what's in the tons of garbage disposed of at the landfill every week. The owners say their employees are trained to spot questionable items, but it's not realistic that they can stop every hazardous substance – as was proven in court last week with Craffey's guilty plea.

Some Bethlehem residents suggest that landfill owners should be held responsible for letting the Mountain View asbestos get into the landfill. Perhaps so. But ultimately, we believe the lesson here is that no matter how strong the regulations, steep the fines, or diligent the operators, hazardous substances will get into the Trudeau Road landfill. The question is when they will leak out. Given the facility's close proximity to the Ammonoosuc River, the danger to the river and to groundwater can't be ignored. Instead of supporting the landfill's growth, the state Department of Environmental Services should acknowledge the original mistake of allowing a huge commercial landfill on this site in the first place and withdraw its approval for expansion. It should also start taking a leadership role in finding other, more environmentally suitable locations for solid waste disposal, instead of taking the easy road of relying on Bethlehem.