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THE COURIER, LITTLETON, N.H., NOVEMBER 17, 1993

Landfill tests come up clean

By Mike Dickerman

BETHLEHEM–An engineering study completed earlier this month shows that soil beneath the two oldest sections of the Consumat Sanco landfill contains virtually no contaminants.

The report, authored by the Concord engineering firm, Sanborn, Head and Associates (SHA), concludes that soils underneath the landfill area recently excavated of buried waste are free of contamination, and that no further excavation is necessary at the landfill site.

The SHA contamination assessment was undertaken last month after the landfill's trash relocation project was completed in mid-October. The project involved moving buried waste and soil from the original unlined 3.82 acre landfill and a 1.3 acre single lined extension area, into a new four-acre double-lined cell.

At the conclusion of the relocation project, SHA observed and logged 38 test pits in and around the excavation area, and had took samples from each for testing.

The SHA report says no volatile organic compounds were detected in the sub-surface samples taken from the test pits, while one sampling taken from a stockpile of above ground soil near the center of the actual excavation area contained one contaminant.

Consumat Sanco's Leo Larochelle, the facility's on-site engineer, explained last week that during the excavation operation, buried waste and any soil in contact with the waste was removed and placed in or over the landfill's double-lined area.

He said the follow-up soil samplings were undertaken to determine if the soil below the buried trash had also been contaminated.

"If the latest tests had shown any contamination, we would have removed that soil as well and placed it in the double-lined area," said Larochelle. "We weren't sure what we were going to find. Obviously, we're pleased with the results."

Larochelle added that the actual excavation encompassed a larger area of the landfill than originally planned as buried trash was discovered outside what officials believed was the original boundary of the unlined section.

"Once we discovered what we had, we decided to keep going until we dug up everything that was there," said Larochelle. "We wanted to get it all taken care of now."

In its report, SHA recommends that Sanco stabilize the relocation site by grading over the area to contain runoff, and seed the area to limit erosion problems. SHA also recommends that the landfill continue its ongoing groundwater monitoring program.

The next series of water tests should prove interesting, admitted Larochelle, as they should show what effect (if any) the removal of waste removal project has had on groundwater sources beneath the landfill.

"We anticipate a gradual improvement in water quality conditions," speculated SHA officials in their report.

Larochelle said the next round of groundwater samplings are slated to be taken later this month.