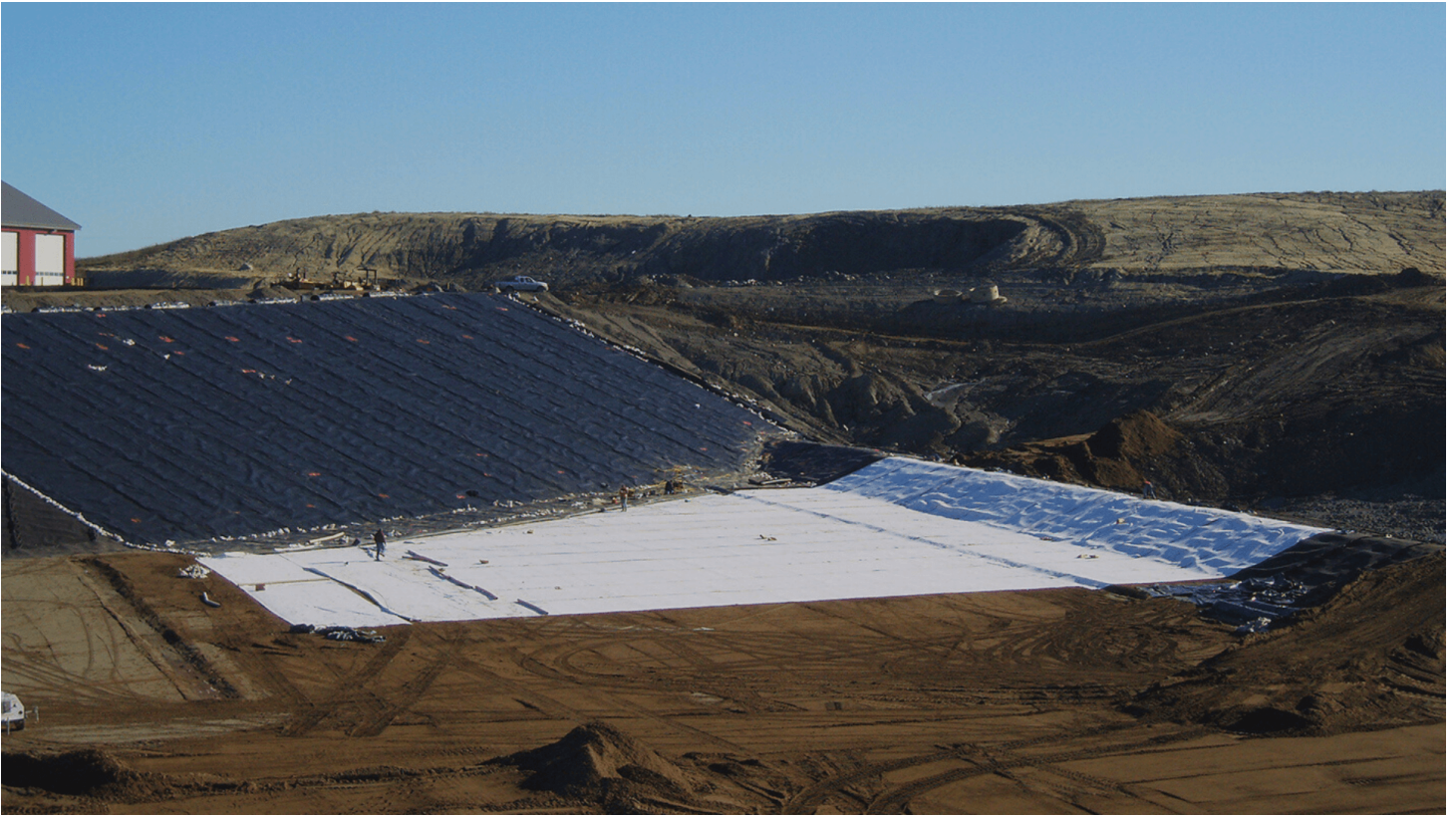


Significant leachate leak at Coventry landfill, nearly 9,000 gallons released



by Daniel Duric March 2, 2024 2 mins read



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COVENTRY — A significant leachate spill at the New England Waste Services of Vermont (NEWSVT) landfill in Coventry was reported, according to a company statement on Feb. 24. The incident, involving the malfunction of the SAFF leachate treatment system, led to the release of approximately 8,699 gallons of leachate, a liquid that percolates through waste in a landfill.

Of this, 5,854 gallons were contained within the site's secondary containment systems. The remaining 2,845 gallons were released but did not leave the landfill property, NEWSVT reported. However, concerns have been raised about the impact of this incident on the environment, with local conservation group DUMP, Don't Undermine Memphremagog's Purity, releasing their own statement on Saturday.

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“This environmental crisis occurred just as DUMP has feared and has warned the Vermont State Department of Environmental Conservation,” said DUMP chair Henry Coe. “DUMP strongly objects to the fact that the treatment system has been operating in violation of state law—without a permit yet being issued— for at least six months.”

NEWSVT says company personnel arrived on-site following the alert and initiated containment and cleanup procedures. This included constructing a ditch to intercept the leachate flow and utilizing pump trucks to remove liquids. The cleanup efforts, completed over several days, involved removing approximately 800 yards of material, including rock, soil, and impacted gravel, and placing it within the landfill.

A full investigation into the cause of the malfunction is underway, in collaboration with the system manufacturer, the company’s letter emphasized.



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“The letter attempts to explain efforts to respond and to clean up the spilled toxic leachate, but no objective third party has yet evaluated the letter’s veracity,” Coe said. “Nor does it disclose how NEWSVT personnel were made aware of the leak. The system, which according to NEWSVT is operational 24/7, is staffed only 8 hours a day, five days a week, and 2 hours on the weekend.”

The leak occurred on a Saturday. The SAFF system had multiple fail-safe features, which unexpectedly failed to activate during the malfunction.

The use of the SAFF system has been suspended at its current location. The system will resume operation in a permanent building after a thorough investigation, necessary repairs, and updates, NEWSVT says. The company has also committed to conducting soil and stormwater sampling in the affected area and will report the results to the DEC.

In public comments on the permit for the leachate treatment technology in December 2023, DUMP took issue with the proposed plan, including the inadequate staffing pattern.

“This is similar to a leak that occurred at a Casella-owned landfill in Bethlehem, NH, where the same inadequate staffing pattern resulted in a leak going undetected, allowing for many thousands of gallons of leachate to escape into the environment,” Coe said.

DUMP has also made the Department of Environmental Conservation aware that they have failed to enforce the law.

“We also strongly object to the fact that Act 250 District 7 Commission has also failed to do their job, allowing this experimental pilot NEWSVT system to be fully operational without the required permit,” Coe added. “Due diligence has not been done by the State of Vermont when it comes to protecting the health and safety of the environment and public health by allowing the unpermitted operation of an experimental system for leachate treatment on the landfill.”