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DES: Casella Deficient In Daily Landfill Cover, Groundwater

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A state inspection in August revealed exposed waste at the Casella Waste Systems landfill in Bethlehem. Here, the working face in the southern portion of the facility's Stage IV, Phase II, looking west and prior to the face being uncovered from its temporary tarp. (Photo courtesy of N.H. Department of Environmental Services)

BETHLEHEM — According to two recent letters from the New Hampshire Department of

Environmental Services, Casella Waste Systems is deficient in providing daily landfill cover and has above-the-limit levels of two suspected carcinogens in groundwater monitoring test wells.

On Oct. 31, DES issued a letter of deficiency to the Rutland, Vt.,-headquartered company for insufficient daily landfill cover after a state inspection on the morning of Aug. 15 showed exposed waste on two landfill faces.

In an Oct. 21 letter to the company, DES stated groundwater monitoring indicates a test well with an exceedance of 1, 4 dioxane, as well as elevated levels in other wells of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOAs), the limits for which were recently set at new standards after concerns by New Hampshire residents about contaminants in drinking water and impacts to human health.

Landfill Cover

In the letter regarding inadequate daily cover addressed to Casella engineer John Gay, DES's Waste Management Division administrator Pamela Hoyt-Denison said CWS has failed to apply and maintain cover materials as required under the state's solid waste rules and is requested to take specific action to address the deficiency.

At the time of the August inspection, which began before daily operations commenced, DES personnel observed exposed waste at two working faces, said Hoyt-Denison.

The exposed waste also comes at a time when the company received complaints about odor, according to the DES letter.

Landfills receiving municipal solid waste are required to place cover material over all exposed waste at the end of each operating day.

CWS operations manager Bruce Glover told DES inspectors that bears have been getting into the landfill at night.

Hoyt-Denison wrote, "While DES agrees that wildlife may be responsible for some of the exposed waste observed at the time of inspection, [the solid waste rule] requires cover material be applied in a manner and at a frequency required to minimize the potential to attract and harbor vectors."

The company is required to provide to DES within 30 days a plan that addresses the issue.

In the solid waste facility inspection report detailing the Aug. 15 inspection, DES personnel met with CWS operations manager Bruce Glover and CWS environmental technician Stephen Allen.

DES requested to see all working faces at the site prior to the commencement of daily operations and Grover said there were two working faces at the landfill — one in Stage IV/Phase II and one in Stage V/Phase II.

At the first face, DES personnel said daily cover comprised two temporary tarps placed over waste, but on the northern edge waste was exposed.

Inspectors said they detected a distinct landfill gas odor while standing in the vicinity and noted an "overt odor" upon removal of the tarps.

DES asked about the frequency of odor complaints, and Grover said a resident of Main Street complained of a sludge odor a week before, according to the inspection report.

On the second face, where Grover said the last filling occurred one week prior, but it had been a month since filling occurred there on a regular basis, DES personnel said they also observed exposed waste throughout the area.

Grover told state inspectors CWS has odor control measures in place at the landfill and Allen said the vague nature of some of the odor complaints makes it difficult to attribute odors to any particular landfill activity.

“In summary, NHDES determined that, on the date of the visit, [Casella] was not in compliance with the selected Solid Waste Rules or the Approved Operating Plan of Record that relate to landfill cover during operations,” DES inspector Tyler Davidson wrote in the report.

Gay and Casella division manager Kevin Roy were asked about the letter of deficiency, specifically if CWS agrees with DES’s findings, and if so, what the company’s plan of action will be for remediation and if CWS had or has a plan in place to deal with nuisance bears or if the bears are a recent phenomenon.

“We have a great deal of respect for the NHDES and those that carry out facility inspections,” Gay said in an emailed response. “We will take corrective actions and retrain where necessary to ensure compliance with regards to daily cover. We have also reached out to the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Wildlife for further assistance.”

Regarding complaints of odors, they were asked how the company, which is proposing a new landfill near Forest Lake State Park in Dalton following the closure of the Bethlehem landfill, will be dealing with the complaints going forward and if it can guarantee to residents there that odors will not be an issue.

“For any odor complaint, we follow strict procedure to respond and react immediately to correct the cause,” said Gay. “We take all complaints seriously and believe our odor controls meet or

exceed the industry standard.”

Groundwater

Gay was asked if CWS agrees with DES’s groundwater findings, and if so, why the exceedances are occurring, where the company believe the sources are, and how CWS intends to reduce them.

“We take great pride in how we operate this facility and the challenges we have overcome since we took over the facility 25 years ago,” said Gay. “In fixing the issues of the unlined landfill, we have accomplished what should be considered a significant environmental success story, taking care of what would no doubt be a major threat without us intervening when we did.”

He called the 1,4 dioxane detections “sporadic” and “low-level” and consistent with residual effects associated with the former unlined landfill and said it is clear the liner systems are working as designed.

In DES’s Oct. 21 letter on annual groundwater quality monitoring results, however, James O’Rourke, of DES’s Waste Management Division, said 1,4-dioxane was detected during the April 2019 monitoring round at a concentration of 1.8 micrograms per liter in the groundwater sample from monitoring well B-304UR, “which is above the Ambient Groundwater Quality Standard (AGQS) and the highest detection on record for the monitoring well.”

DES notes B-304UR is within the Groundwater Management Zone related to the former, removed unlined landfill where impacts to groundwater have been noted previously.

“The 1,4-dioxane detections during the last five monitoring rounds that included 1,4-dioxane analysis each exceeded the revised AGQS ... which took effect Sept. 1, 2018,” said O’Rourke.

On Sept. 30, new rules for the limits of PFOAs went into effect.

“In consideration of the new standards, we note concentrations of PFOA have been detected above the new AGQS during the most recent monitoring rounds at [four] monitoring wells,” said O’Rourke.

Although impacts at two wells are believed to be associated with previously identified historical

issues, the impacts should be tracked closely, he told Casella representatives.

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