

Maine sewage treatment plants scramble to dispose sludge after landfill reduces capacity

by Brad Rogers, WGME
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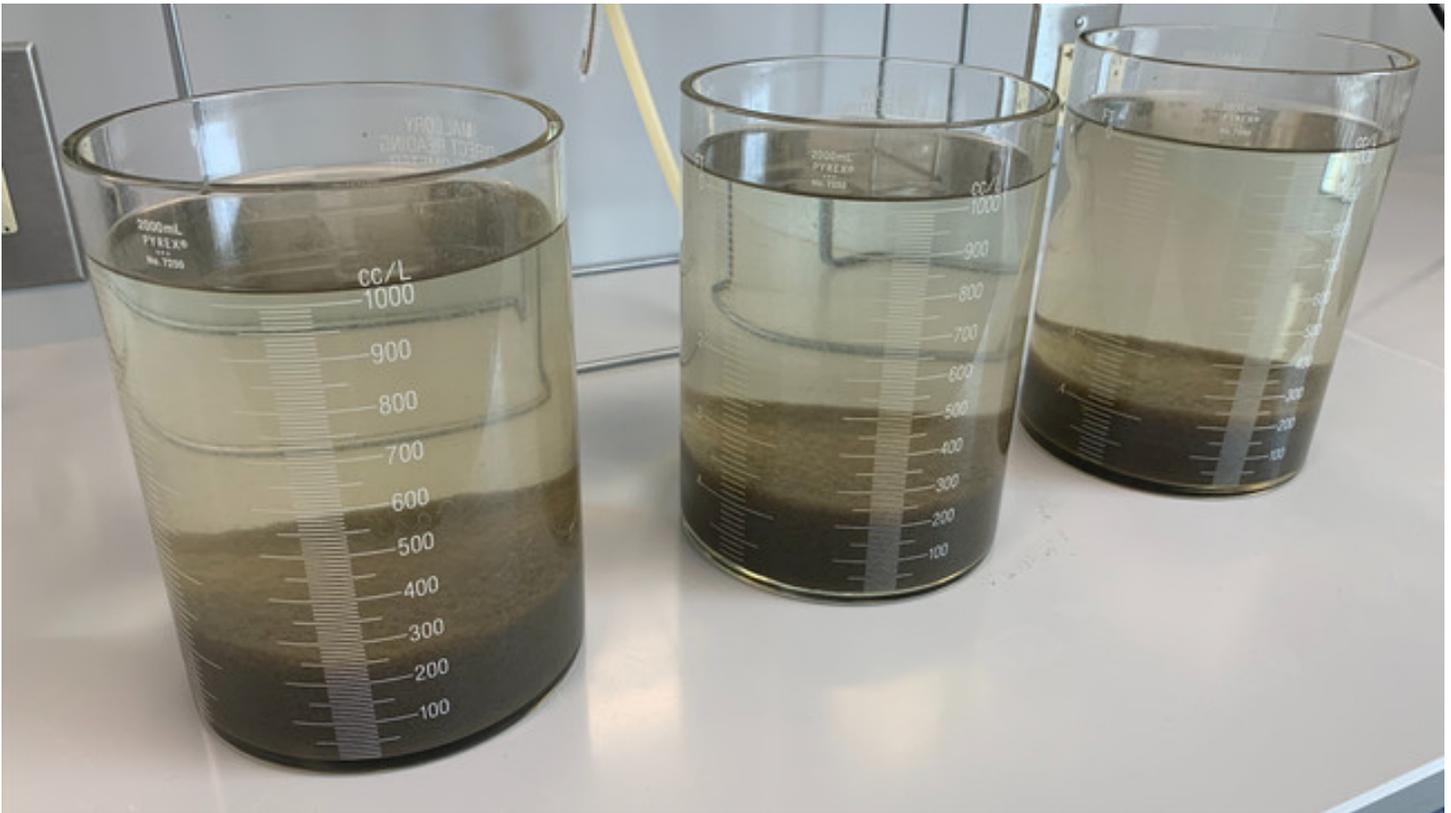


Right now, the private company running Maine's largest state-owned landfill in Old Town says it can no longer accept millions of pounds of sludge per month, at least not with so much water still in it.

Casella says that much water makes the landfill unstable.

Treatment plants across Maine use compactors to squeeze water out of their waste, but it's still pretty wet.

"Our sludge cake is soupy, goopy," Rico said. "So what Casella would do is they would mix it with construction debris."



There is a potential environmental crisis in Maine over the disposal of municipal sludge. (WGME)

A new state law now prevents Casella from taking construction debris from Massachusetts to put in that landfill.

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"We're not convinced that the only way to do this was from importing old couches and mattresses and washing machines from Massachusetts," Sarah Nichols of the Natural Resources Council of Maine said.

The other state law impacting this bans sludge contaminated with forever chemicals known as PFAS from being used as fertilizer in Maine.

As a result, Casella is now charging municipalities nearly three times what they did last year to dispose of sludge.

"This is really falling onto the backs of our municipalities and our taxpayers," Nichols said.

It's a potential environmental crisis Maine's Department of Environmental Protection hopes to avoid.



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The DEP has already granted Casella authorization to temporarily stockpile sludge at its facility in Unity until it can be disposed of properly.

Still, treatment plants across Maine wonder what happens if and when Casella stops taking their sludge.

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"We got a few months, and now we're all scrambling," Rico said. "They got to go somewhere. They either get wasted or they go to the ocean. I'd be violating my permit with DEP if I pump solids to the ocean."

Right now, Casella trucks five to six giant sludge containers a day from Portland's two wastewater treatment facilities, waste that has to go somewhere.

Director Scott Firmin says he's concerned about stability and reliability moving forward.