

Daily Herald

Grayslake landfill works to quell odor complaints

Article / updated: 3/27/2010

By Mick Zawislak

The odor isn't constant but when it hits, you don't need a sensitive sniffer to know there is an issue at the Countryside landfill in Grayslake.

Drywall residue decomposing into a pungent gas has contributed to scores of complaints during the past two years, including 43 since Feb. 1.

"People can smell that at about one part per billion," explained Mike Kuhn, solid waste unit coordinator for the Lake County Health Department. "It has a rotten egg component to it." Steps to correct the problem have fallen short but new measures are underway to solve the problem once and for all.

"Our goal is to complete a gas collection system that will ensure we have no off-site odors," said Bill Plunkett, a spokesman for Waste Management, which runs the landfill on Route 83 near Route 137.

The work includes a new flare to burn off gas and installation of nearly a mile of gas collection pipes and trenches.

"They're putting some of them in areas where they expect gas to be produced," Kuhn noted. "Most of last year, they were trying to address the gas that was coming from the landfill." What happens is also of interest to federal authorities.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in early February issued notices of violations of the Clean Air Act for failing to control emissions of sulfur dioxide and causing odor complaints to Waste Management and Countryside Genco, LLC, which runs a gas-to-energy plant near the landfill.

Gas not used at the plant is supposed to be burned off by the flare. But since 2004, Countryside reported 16 occasions when neither were operating or controlling emissions from the landfill, according to the EPA.

Since 2005, the flare was not working on about 100 occasions ranging from an hour to a month, though the gas-to-energy facility may have been, according to the EPA. The result was that reported emissions of sulfur dioxide have exceeded permitted amounts.

Contributing to the problem were drywall "fines" - a powdery residue that has been pulverized in the construction and demolition waste recycling process. Countryside accepted the drywall

fines for most of 2008, according to the EPA.

That caused an elevated level of sulfur compounds in the gas emitted from the landfill and used in the gas-to-energy plant, according to the agency.

The EPA is working with the landfill operator to craft an agreed plan to address emissions. A new flare is scheduled to be delivered April 16 and the old one will be kept as a back up, according to Kuhn.

"They'll have a computerized control that adjusts depending on what's happening at the co-gen plant. Right now, they have to adjust it manually," he said.

Odor complaints have been ongoing. The smell was so intense on Thanksgiving 2008 that some residents in the Prairie Crossing subdivision that borders the landfill were forced to leave their homes.

Gas collection wells were installed at the time and additional cover material was added last year, but the odor continued.

Some recent complaints may have been related to excavation into the landfill but not all, Kuhn said. Complaints can be made at (847) 377-8096.

"For the last couple of years now, it's an issue we've been going back and forth on with them," said Steve Minsky, a Prairie Crossing resident. "It never seems to get fully rectified."

The Solid Waste Agency of Lake County, which has oversight of waste disposal and recycling, has a host agreement with the landfill.

Executive Director Walter Willis said the agency wants to ensure Waste Management is doing all it can to address odor issues.

"Our intent is to stay on it and keep the pressure on," he said.