

Highmoor Landfill

21 February 2008

Background

Highmoor Landfill is operated by Onyx Highmoor Ltd, part of the Veolia Environmental Services Group. Infinis Regeneration Ltd has a permit to generate energy powered by gas from the landfill, and operate a compound housing two engines, a flare and gas extraction unit, adjacent to the landfill. The site lies within an operational sandstone quarry.

More than 100 residents and councillors attended a public meeting in October 2007, and over 70 attended a drop-in session organised by the Environment Agency on 8 February 2008. The contact details of concerned residents attending these meetings were obtained and since November, we have sent out a monthly bulletin to them which contains updates on the work being carried out on the Highmoor site.

The Environment Agency recognises that the site has been the source of significant odour problems for the residents over the last 10 days and is taking the matter very seriously.

Leachate management

Due to very heavy rainfall in early February, leachate levels in the current working area rose faster than pumps could remove the liquid to the leachate tank on site where it is normally stored prior to disposal off site.

During an inspection by Environment Agency staff, staining was noted above the clay containment on the sandstone wall of the quarry on the north edge of the cell. Although levels were quickly reduced back to normal, as a precautionary measure the Environment Agency has taken their own groundwater samples from boreholes around the site (19-20 February) and results will be made available to residents. Residents were informed that we would be carrying out this monitoring in two media statements issued to the Oldham Chronicle following enquiries from them on 13 and 14 February.

Odour incidents

Following a period of relatively few odour complaints between December and January, the site has performed particularly poorly over the last 10 days.

The following table shows the approximate numbers of complaints made per day – some of these relate to odour noticed the previous day.

	Weather	Complaints	Account
Saturday 9/2/08	Still, clear, cold	4	Excavation works into waste were being carried out over the weekend of 9-10 February to install part of the new gas extraction system. Pipework was laid into fresh waste to enable gas to be extracted as soon as possible.
Sunday 10/2/08	Windy	22	

Monday 11/2/08	Windy	2	No clear reason
Tuesday 12/2/08	Still, clear, cold	30	The gas extraction system continues to be extended on the landfill. The Agency is investigating problems with gas management and disposal on the 12 and 13.
Wednesday 13/2/08	Still, clear, cold	19	
Thursday 14/2/08	Windy	3	No clear reason
Friday 15/2/08	Windy	3	No clear reason
Saturday 16/2/08	Still, clear, cold	8	At 23.30hrs a gas engine in the Infnis compound "tripped" ie switched off and the Infnis logistics centre in Northampton received the automatic alarm call via telemetry. An Infnis technician visited the site and the engine was operational by 03.20hrs on Sunday morning.
Sunday 17/2/08	Still, clear, cold	63	<p>At 04.43hrs the electricity feed to all the key items in the compound (ie the process plant which "pulls" gas from the landfill site, both engines, and the backup flare) tripped out. The root cause for this is under investigation by Infnis, as required by the PPC permit, and their findings will be reported to the Agency.</p> <p>However, Infnis only discovered that the equipment was not functioning at 22.30hrs on Sunday night. A technician visited the site soon afterwards and fixed the problem, so normal gas management was resumed by 01.00hrs. The root cause for alarm failure is also under investigation, and a manual check procedure has been implemented at maximum two hourly intervals to ensure that Infnis are aware of any problems on site and deal with them promptly.</p> <p>The lack of extraction from the site will have resulted in landfill gas being emitted from uncapped areas of the landfill in an uncontrolled manner, leading to strong odours in the vicinity.</p>
Monday 18/2/08	Light breeze, clear, cold	82	Veolia has informed the Environment Agency verbally that due to liquids freezing in the pipework on the landfill, gas extraction was reduced to about 30% of normal rates for 4 hours on Monday evening. Again, the reduced extraction from the site will have led to landfill gas being emitted from the site, resulting in strong odours in the vicinity. Veolia will report their findings to the Environment Agency.
Tuesday 19/2/08	Light breeze, clear, cold	39	

Wednesday 20/2/08	Light breeze, foggy, cold	4	No clear reason; gas extraction should be retuning to normal after the disruption on Sunday and Monday.
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The failures at the site have led to significant complaints from the local community.

Conclusions

The Environment Agency investigation into these incidents will be substantially completed in the next 10 days.

We will:

- Take any necessary enforcement action;
- Improve the communication between Veolia, Infinis and the Environment Agency to ensure the fastest response to any failure at the site;
- Continue to push Infinis for improvements at the gas compound to prevent recurring failures;
- Continue to push Veolia to complete the capping, improve leachate extraction during periods of heavy rain, and carry out all necessary improvements and maintenance of the gas management system on site.

For further information, please contact: Dave Marshall, Environment Team Leader on 721 3511 (internal) or 01925 543511 (external).