

Submitter: Mark Henkels

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB726

This is Mark Henkels. I am a recently retired professor of Public Policy and Administration from Western Oregon University. I have lived just north of Corvallis for 36 years. I want to very strongly endorse the passage of SB726, which would improve and increase the monitoring of methane leaks from Oregon's landfills. I participated in the writing of the "Benton County Talks Trash (BCTT)" process of 2022-2023 which focused on the history, operations, and the potential need for expansion of the Coffin Butte landfill north of Corvallis. My participation in that process and close observation of the facility since have convinced me that the current practices of Coffin Butte do not meet the standards Oregon should have regarding the risks and ongoing production of toxics that leave the site. Problems relating to leachate and odors continue, the latter I noticed at my house yesterday, but probably a more insidious issue is the methane leaks.

Methane emitted from Oregon's landfills is the third most important source of greenhouse gases in Oregon, when we consider how methane affects warming 80 times more than carbon dioxide per pound. But I even more concerned about the significant fire risks associated with the accumulation of leaked methane on the surface of landfills. Once a landfill starts to burn, the fire can last for years. Just last summer there were at least two fires at Coffin Butte that required local fire services to help control, so this is not a purely theoretical risk.

The very recent history of Coffin Butte landfill shows that the current monitoring system is unacceptable. Despite assurances from Republic Services/Valley Landfill that their methane leakage monitoring system showed very few problems, an inspection of only a portion of the landfill by the federal EPA on June 23, 2022 found 61 points where methane exceeded the 500 parts per million (ppm) threshold, with at least 21 spots exceeded 10,000 ppm. The 2022 EPA report noted that Republic Service's own reports found no more than six violations of the 500 ppm threshold of concern, and some found no violations. A follow-up inspection on June 21, 2024 found emissions exceeding 500 parts per million (ppm) at approximately 40 holes in the covering materials, that a flange at the flare station (where they purposely burn methane) had methane emissions over 500 ppm, and that one of the wellheads was open to the atmosphere and had emissions over 500 ppm. This information comes from the Region 10 Office of the Environmental Protection Agency, based in Seattle. Landfill operators such as Republic Services cannot be trusted to adequately monitor methane leaks under the current system.

This should change, both for the long-term health of the ecosystem and for the safety

of nearby residents. Should a major fire break out, the toxics released will exceed anything we have seen yet. And when I can smell the landfill seven miles from my house, you can be sure that the releases of a major fire would hit our region broadly.

I actually believe that what is really needed is for the state to greatly increase its own monitoring of such leaks since landfill operators and their contractors have strong incentives to hide leaks, but certainly SB 726 would be a great step forward to addressing this ongoing problem and greater future risks.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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