

No Coventry landfill expansion without PFAS testing, state says

By Elizabeth Gribkoff

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The Coventry landfill, operated by Casella Waste Systems. Chittenden Solid Waste District photo

The Agency of Natural Resources has announced that it is delaying approval of the controversial Coventry landfill expansion until further groundwater testing is completed.

Residents near the landfill in Vermont, and those who live in Quebec and rely on nearby Lake Memphremagog for drinking water, have called on the state to halt the expansion permitting process until it can be certain that leachate from the landfill will not have a negative impact on the environment or their lives.

In an Aug 2. letter to New England Waste Services of Vermont, a Casella subsidiary, the ANR said the firm must demonstrate that PFAS levels in the groundwater at certain points in and around the landfill comply with state guidelines.

The state's request followed an invitation for public feedback on the conditional approval of the 51-acre expansion of the landfill, said Cathy Jamieson, head of the state's solid waste management division. The agency received 90 sets of comments from organizations and individuals on the plans, she added.

"Some of the comments we received was that that was a gap in the information, and so we just wanted to be certain of the quality of the groundwater near the landfill with respect to PFAS compounds and compliance with the groundwater rules before making a final decision," Jamieson said in an interview Tuesday.

Following the discovery in 2016 of PFAS contamination in Bennington drinking water, the state established new groundwater contamination standards this July that set a 20 parts per trillion aggregate limit for five PFAS substances.

PFAS has been found to affect growth and learning in babies and children, reduce chances of pregnancy among women, and damage the immune system, among other health impacts.

Casella will need to demonstrate that PFAS levels in six groundwater wells near the landfill do not exceed the 20 ppt limit in order to receive final approval from the state.

ANR had granted Casella conditional approval for a 10-year recertification of the 78-acre landfill and for an expansion on the south side of the existing operation.

At a public meeting held in Coventry in June, some residents expressed concerns over odors emanating from the landfill and impacts to the nearby Black River and its receiving water body — Lake Memphremagog.

A member of the Canadian Parliament has also called on Vermont's government to delay the permitting process until studies are carried out to determine the potential impact on the lake, a key water source for those living north of the border.



Joseph Fusco of Casella Waste Systems. Photo by Anne

Galloway/VTDigger

The state has found elevated levels of PFAS in leachate tested from landfills around the state, with Coventry — the state's only open landfill — testing the highest.

Casella plans to minimize the risk of landfill leachate — liquid contaminated with landfill pollutants — leaking into groundwater by double-lining the landfill cells and installing a collection system that stores the contaminated fluid in nearby tanks, according to the ANR's findings on the firm's permit application.

Joe Fusco, Casella's vice president, said in an email Tuesday that the firm would do the testing as requested by ANR.

"PFAS generally has received a lot of attention in the last few years, particularly in southern Vermont," wrote Fusco.

"We view this as, simply, the next step in the permitting process."