

Landfill neighbors complain of illnesses

Carmen Paige

More than 100 people who live near a landfill in Holley-Navarre complained about a variety of ailments during a door-to-door survey.

"The ones who live within a quarter-mile have more issues, and the ones who live over a mile have fewer issues," said Kathleen DeVore-Jones, administrator of the Santa Rosa County Health Department, which analyzed the survey.

"The closer they lived, the more complaints of symptoms, such as burning eyes, nausea and breathing problems."

The Health Department paid for the survey with a federal grant. The respondents live within two miles of the 37-acre Coyote Landfill off Five Forks Road.

Most people said their symptoms started after fires at the construction and debris landfill in October and November and still persist, the survey found.

The problems include groundwater contamination and odors.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has determined groundwater contamination at the landfill exceeds permitted standards and is conducting an assessment, DEP spokeswoman Sally Cooley said.

"We are waiting on the results of that assessment report, which is due in September," she said. "It will tell us the extent of the groundwater contamination. Then we will have to determine what they need to do."

DeVore-Jones said water contamination could pose a problem.

"They are all on public water, but some have well water and use it to fill pools, irrigate lawns and for pets," she said.

The Coyote Landfill is no different from any other landfill, manager John Warren said.

"Is there an occasional odor coming from the site? Yes," he said. "But it is not a constant deal."

Residents plan to take the matter before the Santa Rosa County Commission.

"The symptoms that are reported are all consistent with long-term exposure to hydrogen sulfide," said Bill Kolb, who lives several miles from the landfill. "The longer you are exposed, the more neurological damage is possible."

Kolb said residents will ask commissioners to pay for air-quality tests and health tests for residents who want them.

"We need to identify and quantify these gases so the health risks to these residents can be fully assessed," he said. "That has to be the number-one priority. The important thing is a resolution to the suffering our neighbors are going through."

Commissioner Gordon Goodin said the commission may consider setting up more stringent requirements on construction and debris landfills in the future. The landfill is in his district.

"It is possible to operate a landfill that is not harmful to the neighboring community," he said.