

Residents seek funds for tests of landfill

Many say Coyote dump site is causing illness

Carmen Paige

Residents living near the Coyote Landfill in Holley-Navarre asked Santa Rosa County commissioners Monday to pay for medical and environmental tests to determine the cause of health issues they have faced since fall.

"A significant number of people, including entire families who reside in the vicinity of the Coyote Landfill, are getting ill," said Howard Jones, a home and business owner in Holley-Navarre. "We are asking the county for funds with which to address this critical issue of health."

The residents want money for:

- Voluntary medical testing for everyone within one mile of the site.
- Renting or purchasing air-monitoring equipment and analyzing the air.
- Testing of all private wells within one mile of the site.
- A consultant with experience in pollution issues.

Commissioners said they may pay for the medical tests, which should cost less than \$20,000.

"I am willing for the county to make a financial commitment, and go to the state and federal (agencies) and find out how much they can give to help out," Commissioner Gordon Goodin said.

Commissioner John Broxson said it's important to find the source of the problem, and that a moratorium on approving construction and demolition pits may be necessary.

The commissioners also want a report on testing protocols. And they wonder if Santa Rosa County can piggyback off a study by the Escambia County Health Department on health concerns associated with emissions from the Saufley Field Landfill.

John Warren, general manager for the Coyote Landfill, said the owners would offer up to \$5,000 to assist with air-quality testing with the provision that all sites within a one-mile radius be tested.

"We have six or seven sites, active and inactive, within a one-mile radius that could be sources of some of these issues," he said.

Commissioners were not pleased to learn that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection does not have the equipment, money or expertise to handle the air-quality testing.

"The (Environmental Protection Agency) and the DEP are the ones who most bear the responsibility for total resolution of this problem," Broxson said.

Residents have complained that since the Coyote Landfill caught fire in October, they have lived with a chemical-type stench, which they have likened to the odor of rotten eggs.

But Warren said the odor actually may come from an adjacent landfill, which caught fire after the Coyote Landfill.

A recent door-to-door environmental health survey, conducted by residents and analyzed by the Santa Rosa County Health Department, showed people living less than one mile from the Coyote Landfill had more symptoms than people living between one and two miles from the site.

Their complaints included respiratory issues, upset stomach and dizziness.

Of the 115 surveys analyzed "representing 200 people, including children" all complained of symptoms starting after the fire in October, said Kathleen DeVore-Jones, county health department administrator.

“From the very first day of that fire, we’ve all been exposed to very heavy toxic fumes,” said Robert Grant, who lives 400 feet from the Coyote Landfill.

“I’d like to see something done so we don’t have another Saufley landfill.”