

Residents want landfill 'fixed'

Carmen Paige

For the past 10 months, Bruce "Zeke" Grieshop said he and residents living near the Coyote Landfill have been constantly exposed to groundwater contamination and foul odors from the 37-acre site in Holley-Navarre.

Eighty-three residents have filed a lawsuit in Santa Rosa County Circuit Court against the company.

"Our main objective is not personal monetary gain," Grieshop said. "We want it regulated, cleaned up and fixed. It's an elevated stink hole."

John Warren, the landfill's manager, said he hadn't had a chance to look at the lawsuit and could not respond. However, he did say despite their offers for site tours, only the media has responded.

"With all these allegations, it's hard for me to understand if you haven't set foot on the site, how you can come up with them," he said.

Several residents and their attorney, Van Kirk McCombs II of Jacksonville, gathered Tuesday morning outside the landfill off Five Forks Road to discuss the lawsuit. The suit claims the site's owner has "recklessly and negligently operated" the landfill since 2001, resulting in "off-site air, groundwater, soil and odor pollution."

"The primary goal is to force the defendant to clean up the mess it has made," McCombs said. "That is to remove the groundwater contamination that has been documented to be coming from the landfill's actions."

McCombs, who has handled several cases involving groundwater contamination, said halting operations is a priority.

"Perhaps more pressing for the residents is to get the operations shut down until the extent of the contamination can be properly assessed, and not go back to business until the proper controls are in place to control the odors that are a real nuisance to the residents," he said.

Nan and Jay Kahren live less than a half mile from the Coyote Landfill. The couple began noticing odors in September.

"But it wasn't bad, just like rotten eggs," she said. "We re-did our septic tank. Then, they had the fire in October and from there it's been one thing after another."

Nan Kahren said she has lost customers and potential customers at her family child-care home, and family members have experienced fatigue and respiratory problems.

"We've been through five or six dumps and nothing has affected us like this," she said. "It's horrible."

Warren said the focus has been on the Coyote Landfill but believes attention should be given to neighboring landfills as well.

"There are seven or eight, active and inactive, landfills in a one- to one-and-a-half-mile area," he said. "To be fair, I hope the (environmental) studies will reveal that there could be other sources (for the concerns.)"

The lawsuit seeks to prohibit the landfill from accepting new materials that could pollute the environment and force the owner to study the extent of area pollution since 2001 and remove the source.

“I’m not against landfills, but they need to be maintained and operated properly,” Grieshop said. “We are on the verge of an eco-disaster, and someone needs to do something about it real quick.”