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# Benton County residents report odor and fire risks at Coffin Butte landfill

KLCC | By [Nathan Wilk](#)

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*Nathan Wilk / KLCC*

The Coffin Butte landfill is permitted to accept 1.1 million tons of waste each year.

Residents in rural Benton County say they're concerned about odor and fire risk at the Coffin Butte landfill.

The site accepts over 1 million tons of garbage annually from across Oregon and Washington. It's located about 8 miles north of Corvallis along Oregon Highway 99W near the town of Adair Village.

Neighbors report experiencing frequent "bad-air days," when a strong acrid or

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KLCC spoke to those community members during a tour led by the Eugene-based environmental group Beyond Toxics.

Mark Yeager lives about five miles from the landfill. He said the odor has become far more frequent over the last decade.

“This past winter, there were probably two dozen times that I would walk out on the deck and say ‘I can’t go outside to run today,’” said Yeager. “Or I don’t think it’s appropriate for me, because I really don’t know what I’m breathing.”

Kate Harris, who lives in the Soap Creek community southwest of the landfill, has children who attend school in Adair Village.

“You’re like, ‘oh, it’s a dump day,’” said Harris, “and deciding whether or not we’re going to do recess outside, or take the kids home.”

In an unattributed statement emailed to KLCC, the landfill’s owner, Republic Services, said it provides daily coverage to its garbage, and it’s invested in state-of-the-art gas collection technology.

“We make every effort to limit on-site odors and offsite impacts,” the company wrote.



*Nathan Wilk / KLCC*

Soap Creek Valley resident Joel Geier said he nearly had to evacuate his home last month. He said the

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## Reducing Fire Risk

On July 24, firefighters responded to a grass fire near a flare stack which burns off methane gas from the landfill. The exact cause of the blaze is unknown.

“The obvious cause is the open flame stack that was close by,” said Adair Rural Fire & Rescue Chief Aaron Harris. “But there’s no way to corroborate that.”

Nearby resident Joel Geier said he nearly had to evacuate. He believes that if the fire jumped to nearby trees, it may have been just minutes before it reached his home.

“We’ve been aware for a while it could be a risk,” said Geier. “But when you’re actually in the situation, it’s extremely stressful, and you’re trying to make immediate decisions on what you should grab, and are you going to have to leave some animals behind?”

Emergency responders extinguished the blaze within minutes, according to Harris. Republic said its operating manager arrived around 12 minutes after fire officials.

“We have robust monitoring and emergency management systems in place to protect employees, the community and the environment in the event of a fire,” Republic wrote in an email. “That system worked as designed.”

However, neighbors argue Republic should be doing more to monitor the area, shield the flare stacks, and reduce the density of trees on its property.

Greier said the company was slow to trim fuel on the landfill, even as the area experienced triple-digit temperatures this summer.

“Everyone in this area knows that you’re supposed to mow, and not leave tall grass standing like that,” said Greier. “The fact they left that all the way into almost the end of July is a sign that they’re not being diligent.”

Republic told KLCC it’s trying to prevent future fires by clearing away grass and undergrowth on its property. Company representatives have also said they’re working to comply with environmental standards.

highly flammable concentrations. According to Republic, an unreleased EPA follow-up from June of this year also found surface emissions beyond the legal limit.



*Nathan Wilk / KLCC*

Completed covering at the Coffin Butte Landfill. Beneath the grass, there are filled-up garbage cells.

## The Attempt to Expand

Last month, Republic submitted an application to Benton County to [expand the landfill](#). The company said it needs more space, or the site will be full within around 13 years.

However, Harris—one of the nearby residents—said she’s worried about the site’s impact on efforts to expand housing in the area.

“The developer may have a hard time selling the homes and they may not be willing to expand Adair Village itself, if things go too far in the wrong direction,” she said.

Geier said neighbors have long expected that the landfill would close once it was full.

“This makes us feel that this landfill is never going away, and instead their plan is just to keep expanding,” said Geier. “That’s really a different scenario than we were expecting when we moved here, and frankly, it makes me worry about the future of the whole neighborhood.”



expansion application. The decision could later be appealed to the Board of County Commissioners.

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Nathan Wilk joined the KLCC News Team in 2022. He is a graduate from the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. Born in Portland, Wilk began working in radio at a young age, serving as a DJ and public affairs host across Oregon.

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