

# Whinney Hill landfill site, Accrington

17 December 2024

## Questions and answers document

This document has been produced by the Environment Agency, with input from the UK Health Security Agency, to answer questions from the community regarding Whinney Hill landfill site in Accrington. The Environment Agency is the primary regulator of the waste activities at the site in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations. This document will be updated as and when new questions are raised.

### Odour

#### Q: Why have I noticed odour from the site recently?

**A:** In late 2023 the operator of the site, Suez Recycling and Recovery Lancashire Ltd, moved landfilling operations to a new location within its permitted area, known as Enfield Quarry. Enfield Quarry sits to the eastern end of the site and is closer to residential areas than previous operations. The process of handling and landfilling waste material does inevitably generate odour, the closer it is to residential areas the greater the risk of impacting the community.

Over a number of years, the site has been progressively filled with waste and the landfill is now approaching capacity. Enfield Quarry is one of the final areas available for landfilling activities.

#### Q: What is the Environment Agency doing about the issues at the site?

**A:** The Environment Agency is the primary regulator of the waste activities at the site in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations. We have made it clear to Suez that they must take all necessary steps to minimise the impacts caused by their operations. We also expect them to keep the community informed about what they are doing to mitigate the impacts.

We have increased our regulatory visits and introduced frequent visits to the local community to check on odour and pests. We will continue carrying out these checks until the issues are resolved.

We are working hard to ensure that Suez complies with environmental regulations and minimises the impact on local residents.

#### Q: What is Suez doing to reduce the impact of odour on the community?

**A:** The specifics of what is happening day to day on the site and the detail of future plans is for Suez to describe. Suez have created a community website for Whinney Hill to keep residents up to date. You can view that at <https://www.suez.co.uk/en-gb/whinney-hill>! The Environment Agency are insistent that Suez provide assurance that all control measures, such as waste cover and landfill gas controls are in place and effective on a daily basis. This is the requirement of the environmental permit.



### Q: What are the different types of odour at a landfill site?

**A:** There are two main odour sources that the community may notice coming from the landfill:

1. The waste as it is deposited can produce an odour like a household dustbin
2. The gases produced by the biological and chemical breakdown of the waste over time producing a variety of odours including a vinegar, ammonia and sulphur (rotten egg).

The waste that goes to Whinney Hill landfill is largely from household bin collections in East Lancashire. In warmer weather the waste from these bin collections tends to be more odorous, this then increases odours at the landfill site when it is tipped.

As waste breaks down in the landfill it generates landfill gas. This gas will tend to rise through the landfill. The rate of landfill gas generation depends on number of factors such as the age of the waste, the type of waste, how wet it is and the weather conditions. Landfill gas typically contains methane (approximately 65%) and carbon dioxide (35%) which are not odorous gases. There will typically be a range of other compounds at relatively low concentrations within the landfill gas known as trace gases. These trace gases can contain substances which cause landfill gas to be odorous.

## Pests

### Q: Why are there so many gulls at the site?

**A:** The gull population at the site fluctuates but this year numbers appear to have risen without an obvious cause. An increase in gull numbers is normally a result of the presence of a readily accessible food supply and habitats where they can build nests and breed. The landfill is an environment that provides a source of food and large areas of land where they can stay relatively undisturbed.

### Q: What is Suez doing to reduce the impact of gulls on the community?

**A:** Suez are taking steps to manage the gulls in line with the environmental permit. They are expected to cover the waste at the end of each day to reduce the food available for birds scavenging on the landfill. During our regulatory visits they have been deploying a variety of other bird control methods, such as cannons and birds of prey to disperse the gulls away from the site. However, these measures may disperse the large population of gulls into the local community.

The exact detail of what Suez are doing, or what they are considering to minimise the impact of the gulls is for them to describe. This does include those already listed within their pest management plan but is not limited to just those measures. We expect Suez to consider all measures available to them.

Gulls, their eggs and nests are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). Harming them and killing them can result in large fines and criminal charges.



## General

### Q: Will the odour and pests be completely eradicated at the site?

**A:** No operational landfill could ever promise to be completely odour and pest free. This is mainly due to the nature of waste materials and the operations and processes that occur on site. There may be occasions where odour and pest levels do increase, however these should be short lived and not have a prolonged impact on a local community. The Environment Agency would expect all appropriate measures to be employed by the operator to make sure that the risk is managed.

### Q: Can you close the site down?

**A:** We expect Suez to meet the conditions set out in its environmental permit and work to their environmental management plan, trying all measures available to reduce the impact of odour and pests on the community.

If Suez do not undertake, or consider, all measures needed to reduce the impact the site is having on the community then we can escalate our enforcement response. We have options which can make the operators comply with conditions on the permit and, in more severe cases where we feel the operators are not doing enough, we can issue regulatory enforcement notices so that an operator takes steps to make improvements. We can also consider regulatory notices that can reduce or suspend waste activities at the site.

## Health impacts - provided by the Health Security Agency (UKHSA)

### Q: What can I smell?

**A:** The odour pollution from waste at the landfill site. Waste odour is caused by fresh waste rapidly decomposing and tends to come from vehicles travelling to and from the site and whilst it is tipped. This is similar to the odours that are contained within a domestic bin. It poses little risk to human health and can be tackled by depositing the waste quickly and covering it with soils called “daily cover”.

### Q: Are the odours causing or going to cause health effects?

**A:** The human nose is very sensitive. Many things have a strong smell at levels at which there are no direct harmful effects to health. However, strong smells are unpleasant and can impact on wellbeing leading to stress and anxiety. Some people may also experience symptoms, such as nausea, headaches or dizziness, as a reaction to strong smells, even when the substances that cause those smells are themselves not harmful to health. Following exposure to any substance, the adverse health effects depend on several factors, including the amount to which you are exposed (dose), the way in which you are exposed, the duration of exposure, the form of the chemical and if you were exposed to any other chemicals.



### Q: What can I do to reduce my risk?

**A:** Individuals can close doors and windows whilst the smell is present and then open them to vent the smell from the premises when the smell has cleared.

### Q: What symptoms may I experience as a result of odour?

**A:** Short-term transient health effects may be experienced such as irritation to the eyes, nose and throat. People who have health conditions that affect breathing, such as asthma, may experience increased frequency and/or severity of symptoms. With continuing exposure, these effects may be prolonged but are not anticipated to continue long-term once exposure is reduced.

### Q: What can I do to reduce symptoms caused by odour?

**A:** To limit the effects of the odour as much as possible, we would advise:

- Close windows if there is an outdoor odour and open them once any outdoor odour has reduced. You could consider closing windows at night and opening them in the morning in the absence of odour.
- Ventilate your property when there is no odour outdoors.
- Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you have concerns about your individual circumstances and require health advice.

## Who to contact

### Q: Who do I report incidents of odour and gulls to?

**A:** We encourage people to report things to us on our 24-hour incident hotline: 0800 807060. Or via email: [incident\\_communication\\_service@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:incident_communication_service@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Reporting things to us helps us to build up a picture of the extent and impact of the pest and odour issue within the community.

### Q: Who do I contact about health concerns relating to the site?

**A:** Members of the community should contact NHS 111 or their GP if they have concerns about their health and need advice.



## Staying informed

### Q: How can I stay updated with information relating to the site?

**A:** We're committed to keeping the community informed about our actions and progress at the site through regular community updates and attendance at scheduled community liaison events.

We have created a dedicated webpage to share up to date information about Whinney Hill landfill site. You can access the webpage on the following link -

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/cumbria-and-lancashire/information-on-whinney-hill-landfill-site>

You can also sign up to our mailing list through the dedicated webpage to receive regular community updates.

