

Bletchley Landfill - Malodour

17 November 2023

Context

This briefing note should be read in conjunction with our briefing note of 26 October 2023 which provides the background to this matter.

Malodour reports

The Environment Agency received 261 reports of malodour in October and have received over 140 reports during November thus far.

The actions we, the Environment Agency, are taking:

As the primary regulator for the landfill we are, and have been, undertaking the following:

- Recording all reports of malodour passed to us using our incident hotline. These reports are notified to the operator to investigate and supply details of their findings to us for assessment. This is in addition to conducting our own assessments and investigations as per below.
- Regular assessments of odour to confirm the extent, severity, and source of the odours.
- Regular inspections of the landfill to assess the sources and underlying causes of the odour and to monitor actions being taken by the operator to address the issue.
- Regular liaison with the site operator to require, and drive, improvements on site to aid in the reduction of off-site malodour.
- Regular communications with local residents, Parish Council representatives, local MP, and other interested parties to keep them apprised of the situation.

We understand that the updates and briefings provided to date may seem generic and do not give specific answers about the causes of these malodours, this is because our regulatory response is ongoing. Our findings are detailed within our Compliance Assessment Forms which are available on the public register. Please note these reports will not be available until 28 days after they are issued to the operator as they have this period in which to appeal or challenge the content. If they choose to challenge our report this will delay the release.

To date we have issued the operator non-conformance scores in relation to odour and management for significant breaches of their Environmental Permit, in accordance with our [compliance classification scheme](#), and set actions to address them. We have a range of enforcement responses available to us in line with our Enforcement and Sanctions Policy and will utilise those most appropriate in these circumstances.

We have attended the landfill and local area on the 16 October, 25 October, 12 November and 16 November 2023. During these visits we have substantiated malodours from the landfill that we assessed as at levels that constituted pollution and were not acceptable.

An additional inspection of the landfill was undertaken on 31 October 2023 for the purpose of assessing works being undertaken by the operator and assessing potential sources of malodour.

It is the responsibility of the operator to manage their site in accordance with their Environmental Permit. Where we identify non-compliance, we are and will continue to take appropriate action, including but not limited to, undertaking off-site odour assessments, site inspections and responding to odour reports.

Timescales

Our regulatory team have extensive experience of dealing with issues like this one. Unfortunately, one thing we have learnt is that resolving an issue like this is both complex and time consuming. As such, whilst we fully appreciate the impact this is having on residents, we are unable to confirm how long it will take to resolve. There is no action our officers could take to instantly reduce the odour, which can be exacerbated by certain weather conditions.

We will endeavour to keep you updated on the actions we are taking and can confirm that the matter will remain a high priority until such time as the malodours are significantly reduced.

Health Concerns

There are two main sources of odour from landfill activities, the waste itself and the landfill gas which is generated as waste decomposes over time. Landfill gas typically contains methane (approximately 65%) and carbon dioxide (35%) which are not odorous. It also contains 'trace' gases present in very small quantities (around 1% in total). Some of the trace chemicals are very odorous and can be detected by the human nose at extremely low concentrations. Hydrogen Sulphide is a trace gas that can cause the 'rotten eggs' smell, it can be smelt at much lower concentrations than the levels that can cause harm. Any gases will have undergone significant dilution by the time they are smelt in the village and it is therefore very unlikely to impact human health. Whilst not harmful to health, it is recognised that the odours themselves can have an impact on peoples' sense of wellbeing which can manifest as nausea, headaches and dizziness.

Whenever people are concerned about their personal health, they should visit their General Practitioner (GP) or contact NHS Direct on 111 or <https://www.nhs.uk/>

Concerned about the site – who to contact:

If the intensity and duration of odour is such that it is offensive to you or is affecting how you use your home or local amenity, please call our free 24-hour incident hotline number: **0800 807060**

When you call our hotline about odour please provide as much of the information as you can:

- When you first noticed the problem.
- How long it lasted.
- When was it at its worst and is it still occurring?
- Where you noticed it.
- What were the weather conditions like
- What it smelt like.
- Is the problem constant or intermittent?
- The intensity of the odour on a scale of 1-6.

Please use our numerical intensity of the odour categories:

0 - No odour

1 - Very faint odour

2 - Faint odour

3 - Distinct odour

4 - Strong odour

5 - Very strong odour

6 - Extremely strong odour

What happens when you report a problem?

We would like to reiterate that all calls are logged and taken seriously. The information is provided to the operator for investigation, though please be assured that no personal information such as names or addresses are shared. While we may not be able to send an officer out to the site every time, the reports provide valuable data on the nature and scale of the problem, and we appreciate the effort you take in passing them to us.

How we will keep you informed:

Our officers are working hard to investigate this issue, and monitoring the actions taken by the operator through regulation of the permitted activities on site.

We need to focus our resources where we have the best chance of addressing this issue. As such we will continue to update you through the issuing of regular briefing notes like this one. Our next briefing will be provided no later than 18 December 2023.