
Since September, the Environment Agency, Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council have been receiving reports of odour in and around the Newton Aycliffe and Darlington area.

The Environment Agency's investigations have found that odours are coming from the Aycliffe Quarry Landfill site. This site is authorised by an environmental permit issued by the Environment Agency. The site has a landfill gas extraction system, but the Environment Agency has instructed the operator, The Ashcourt Group Ltd, to improve the system. Ashcourt has provided the Environment Agency with a programme of works which began on 6 November 2023. This includes installing additional gas extraction wells and connecting them to the existing system. The Environment Agency is monitoring the progress and effectiveness of the work. As the work progresses and the operator collects more gas, the Environment Agency expects the frequency and intensity of odour to diminish.

As well as improving the gas extraction system, capping works are also being carried out. Capping layers act to seal in the waste and they also allow gas extraction systems to operate more effectively. One section of the site needs to be regraded to allow for machine access to install the capping layer. Depending on weather conditions, this work is expected to be finished on 21 January 2024. Further capping works will then be laid across the top of the site, which are expected to be completed by Easter next year, due to the large area that requires work.

Given the longer timeframe for completion, the Environment Agency will undertake some targeted air quality monitoring at locations around the site and in the community. They will also be looking to locate a fixed monitoring unit, which will take readings 24/7. The data gathered will be shared with Durham County Council, Darlington Borough Council and the UK Health Security Agency to help them provide health advice.

We understand how distressing it can be for people who experience landfill gas odour which can cause stress and anxiety. Landfill gas is mostly methane and carbon dioxide, which are odourless and colourless. However, the gas also contains hydrogen sulphide that, even in small quantities, has a strong smell of rotten eggs. This is what residents can smell.

The human nose is very sensitive and can detect odorous chemicals at concentrations in air which pose no risk to human health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a short-term odour value protective of odour annoyance of 7 µg/m³ (5 parts per billion) as a 30-minute average and monitoring data will be compared to this level in the first instance. Odour can be a cause of stress and anxiety, even when the substances causing the odours are not harmful to health.

If you are concerned about any symptoms you are experiencing then please contact your GP or call NHS 111.

The Environment Agency would encourage any constituents who are experiencing odours to call their 24/7 incident hotline on 0800 807060.