

## **Slido Responses from Community Engagement Meeting (26/05/2021)**

### **Continuation of landfilling**

#### **1) Why are Walleys Quarry Ltd still accepting waste to the site**

Any decisions to stop and recommence waste management activities have been taken by the operator, the EA has been informed of these actions but they have not been taken in consultation. The EA has not suspended waste inputs to the landfill.

We recognise that decision's to suspend or stop landfill operations may create problems for waste management chains. "Fresh waste" often has different characteristics to much older waste deposits responsible for majority of landfill gas and odour risk.

For this specific landfill we have also increased supply chain audits for waste entering the site. This is important to ensure only waste authorised by the Permit is accepted to site. Walleys Quarry Ltd are required to check documentation that accompany each load before disposal. We recognise that visual checks of vehicles at point of disposal is useful but not straightforward or easy process.

We have been informed that seven separate waste loads have been rejected between the end of April and the beginning of June. The waste did not adhere to the type allowed in their permit.

We are seeking to maintain our presence on site and local area. We are firm but fair in our expectations on how the operator makes site improvements and restore compliance with their environmental permit. This will follow our published guidance and Regulators' Code of Conduct.

### **Air quality monitoring units and in home**

#### **2) What gases apart from H<sub>2</sub>S are being emitted and monitored by the air quality monitoring units so we can understand if these are at safe levels**

The EA have installed four air quality Mobile Monitoring Facility (MMF) units which are to remain in place for at least 3 months to continuously assess air quality. Air Quality data has been collected from 4 March onwards.

These units have been monitoring relevant parameters, including methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) particulates and hydrogen sulphide (H<sub>2</sub>S). It also has a weather station which will record wind speed, direction, temperature and pressure. Data has been collated into monthly reports which we have provided to Public Health England so that they can offer expert opinion on any human health impacts. If you would like further details on this and access to the PHE reports please use the links below:

#### **March-April 2021**

Please click [here](#) for the Health Risk Assessment of air quality monitoring results April 2021 \*\* updated 4 June 2021

Please click [here](#) for the Monthly Air Quality Monitoring Report- April Monitoring Period

Please click [here](#) for the March-April Air Quality Data Set

We expect to receive PHE's reports for April to May at the end of June. Once we receive them, they will be uploaded onto the citizen's space page.

### **3) What are the potential health impacts of the gases the AQMs are monitoring for?**

The data that the EA has provided PHE have been compared to available health-based air quality guidelines and standards or assessment levels, such as World Health Organization (WHO) air quality guidelines and UK air quality standards.

The results show that throughout April, concentrations of hydrogen sulphide were below the World Health Organization 24-hour health acute based-guideline value. But at times were above the WHO's 30 minute *annoyance* guideline levels.

The detailed PHE report, outlining the potential impacts can be found [here](#)

### **4) When will April's Report be available?**

The Public Health England, Health Risk Assessment is provided to us on a monthly basis. The April report is now available.

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We expect to receive PHE's report for April to May at the end of June. As soon as we receive the report it will be uploaded onto the citizen's space page.

### **5) Why aren't the EA monitoring the air quality in peoples' homes/offices where gas emissions will be more concentrated/undiluted?**

We do not undertake indoor air quality monitoring, as the purpose of gathering such data, would be to assess health impacts, which is not our role or area of expertise.

Please contact the local authority for information on what the council do [www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/all-services/environment/environmental-health/walley-what-we-can-do](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/all-services/environment/environmental-health/walley-what-we-can-do) and for the latest PHE report please click [here](#)

### **Hydrogen sulphide (H<sub>2</sub>S) and other gases**

### **6) How will the EA/PHE inform residents if there is a sudden increase in gas levels from the site that far exceed WHO health guideline in the night**

Our air quality monitors are placed at fixed locations and continually collect data (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) for review at regular intervals. If there is a significant increase in odour reports the data will be reviewed and shared with PHE. If PHE recommend there is a need to amend public health advice this will be undertaken in collaboration with Local Authorities and other partner organisations.

Landfill odours may contain odorants (e.g. H<sub>2</sub>S – rotten egg smell) that are noticeable at extremely low concentrations. Significant increase in smell doesn't necessarily mean there has

been a significant increase in gas levels. We recognise that whether the WHO guidelines have been breached or not it can still cause annoyance and distress for some people.

**7) Can you provide a breakdown of the air quality monitoring data with regards to what is causing the excess odours and when the odour is worse in terms of weather, time of day and whether it is a weekday or weekend. How do these figures compare to last year?**

Odour from landfills can fluctuate depending on weather conditions. Typically changes in weather that increase likelihood of low wind / or zero wind conditions may result in more noticeable odours. “Temperature inversions” created when air closer to land is cooler than air at higher altitudes can also make it harder for odours to disperse. Spring and autumn are often more likely to see these conditions.

Landfill’s will not be odour free and this may fluctuate during the day in response to site operations, weather conditions, and other unique site specific surroundings that can change the way air moves and odours disperse. Correlating odour with time, and site activity, can be useful to pin point intermittent sources. We are dealing with the immediate issues now and correlating against previous year’s findings could be useful when we get to the stage of “refining” site operations.

All the air quality monitoring data is available on our Citizen Space pages.

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**8) Can the EA’s detailed technical reports and Action Plan be made available to the general public?**

Our technical reports and submissions from the operator are public register information and can be requested from us via [enquiries\\_westmids@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries_westmids@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Summary of our regulatory reports can be found in our weekly updates on the Citizen Space page [environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/walleys-quarry-landfill-sliverdale](https://environment-agency.gov.uk/west-midlands/walleys-quarry-landfill-sliverdale)

Walleys Quarry Ltd are also expected to complete 60 individual actions to further reduce the odour from the site. These include:

- By 1 June complete the relevant actions it has identified following its surface emissions survey work
- Repeat a full surface emissions survey by 18 June and report its findings by 25 June to allow the regulator to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions.
- Investigate the integrity of the gas utilisation plant and flares system and submit a detailed report of findings by 4 June

- Complete a methane flux box survey, which is a different type of emissions survey used to test the capping, by 30 September
- Submit a revised dust management plan by 14 June

**9) Can it be guaranteed that gas and leachate management will mitigate gas migration offsite?**

Even with well designed, constructed, and managed landfills some background odour will be expected but shouldn't cause annoyance or constitute "Pollution" offsite. As with any technical process, there is risk of unforeseen mechanical breakdowns (e.g. gas engine or flare) or extreme weather events that may cause short term increase in odour, but this should only be in exceptional circumstances.

The landfill is designed and constructed to contain leachate which is often created as waste breaks down. The operator must manage leachate to levels agreed within the permit which is supported by hydro-geological risk assessments. Landfills typically have perimeter monitoring points for gas and groundwater quality which can provide indicator that emissions are contained.

So whilst nothing can be 100% guaranteed; with good engineering and management practices the residual risk will be minimised as far as practicably possible.

**Future of Walley's**

**10) Is there a rough idea as to how long will this incident go on for?**

The ongoing incident with Walley's Quarry landfill is complex and it is difficult to say how long the issues may continue, but we are working hard to ensure the operator returns to a state of compliance with their permit and in doing so deals with excessive odour. We would expect to see some gradual improvement especially as capping works become more extensive and more gas management infrastructure is installed on site.

Realistically we will commit more resource than usual for this site throughout the coming months.

**11) How can we be assured that the company will not allow this to happen again?**

The Permit conditions reflect the minimal expectations for this site. We will take action to ensure the operator is compliant with their Permit. We also encourage operators to go above and beyond basic compliance; and many do so to gain recognition and more favourable reputation with local communities and customers.

We also expect the operator to continue reviewing and updating their management practices for the site. This reflects new understanding about the landfill and unique challenging setting. As capping works progress, and more gas infrastructure is commissioned, the likelihood of repeat occurrence should also reduce.

**12) Can the site be fully capped with Walley's Quarry Ltd paying for the closure & post closure maintenance and monitoring**

Once a landfill site is full and it cannot accept any further waste, it enters closure process. However, the Environmental Permit conditions still require the Permit holder to manage the site and complete the environmental monitoring. This continues for many years until the waste mass is stable and pollution risk is minimal.

To remove the requirements of an Environmental Permit the operator has to apply to us to Surrender the Permit. To do this they need to demonstrate the site no longer presents a significant risk of pollution or harm to human health. This could be many decades in the future.

## **Health**

### **13) How can the residents adhere to Covid guidelines under the current circumstances?**

If residents have any health or wellbeing concerns, they should contact their local GP in the first instance or ring the NHS helpline 111.

We are trying to make sure our engagement is accessible especially using online and teleconference facilities.

### **14) How are residents being supported by the EA and the local council regarding the impact the site is having on their health and wellbeing?**

Our main objective is to ensure that the operator complies with their Permit, and in doing so reduces odour from the landfill.

If residents have any health or wellbeing concerns, they should contact their local GP in the first instance or ring the NHS helpline 111.

Public Health England are responsible for providing guidance and advice on risk to human health.

For more information please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/contacts-public-health-england-regions-local-centres-and-emergency>

Public Health England are also inviting residents to participate in a daily health survey so they can assess health impacts from Walleys Quarry and build up further evidence to support our regulation.

The survey can be found here: [Health survey for Newcastle residents - Staffordshire County Council Newsroom](#)

## **EA's handling of the situation**

### **15) Why was the landfill allowed to be situated near a built-up community?**

We are aware that many people in the community are unhappy that the landfill is so close to housing. The location of the landfill was not a decision for the Environment Agency but we are Statutory Consultee for responding to Planning Applications. Planning Permission for the landfill

and housing are decided under relevant Planning Regulations which are administered via the County and Borough Councils respectively.

The Environment Agency did issue a Permit for the landfill and associated operations. In doing so the Applicant would have to comply with relevant technical guidance for landfill to ensure pollution risk beyond the site boundary is minimized to an acceptable level.

**16) What is the EA's opinion on their decision to increase tonnage?**

When we issued the permit variation we issued a Decision Document that explains our reasoning. This is a public register document.

It is available here: [decision-document.pdf \(environment-agency.gov.uk\)](#)

**17) What do we classify as a Major Incident and who determines this classification?**

A Major Incident is a specific term to describe an event or situation with a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responders. Major Incidents can be declared at the discretion of any emergency responder agency. This would include the EA and Local Authority, although this is usually applied to only the most serious incidents.

The Environment Agency would use the compliance assessment guidance and our Common Incident Classification System (CICS) which categorises incidents based on their actual impact alongside other information as a guide to help us make a decision regarding a major incident.

More information on our compliance scoring can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessing-and-scoring-environmental-permit-compliance/assessing-and-scoring-environmental-permit-compliance>

We are requiring the operator to deal with the root cause of excessive landfill odour. We have committed significant resource and treating as a priority.

**18) At what point would the EA decide to close the landfill down?**

We understand that many residents would like Walleys Quarry landfill to be closed. The landfill is still active and therefore closing it as it is would not stop odours emitting from the site. Instead, we are working with the operator to bring the site back into compliance with their Environmental Permit, in line with our published guidance, relevant legislation and the Regulators Code of Conduct.

We have served an enforcement notice requiring the operator to take appropriate action to minimise odour including installation of permanent and temporary capping. We will continue to review our position, depending on the response from Walleys Quarry Ltd in accordance with our published enforcement guidance.

More information on our enforcement and sanctions policy can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-agency-enforcement-and-sanctions-policy/environment-agency-enforcement-and-sanctions-policy>

Revoking the Permit is usually a last option because we want the operator to take responsibility for their landfill operations and emissions for the longer term.

We are also mindful that closing a landfill could have significant impact on local waste provisions and linked waste supply chains. The operator is also in more favorable position to make necessary site improvements if the business remains viable. Closing a site prematurely is not without risks.

### **Odour at night**

#### **19) Are the EA planning to carry out site visits at night as this is when the Air Quality Monitoring Reports have indicated the odours are worse?**

We have previously visited the area at times outside of operating hours when odours have been reported to us and we will keep under review as part of our regulatory response. Currently the air quality monitoring units are present and operating 24 hours a day and recording this data.

We recognise excessive odour is ongoing problem, if there are compelling reasons to do so then it remains an option for us.

### **Comparison to other sites**

#### **20) There are examples of other sites having their permits suspended, such as the Clayton Hall Landfill and Blaydon Quarry, why has the same not happened with Walleys Quarry?**

Though we recognise these examples, we cannot necessarily apply the same actions taken for Clayton Hall Landfill and Blaydon Quarry to the ongoing incident at Walleys Quarry Landfill. This is because incidents do not follow a 'one size fits all' approach.

We have worked hard with the operator to develop a plan of action specifically for this site and the exceptional circumstances related to this incident. The steps Walleys Quarry Ltd have outlined are expected to reduce odour levels from the site. We will keep our Enforcement options under review.

### **Activities on the site**

#### **21) Will waste trommelling speed up the release of toxic gases such as hydrogen sulphide and gypsum?**

"Trommeling" reduces particle size, which increases surface area for reactions. Under certain conditions this may increase gas production rates in landfills.

There is the potential for gypsum (often unintentionally) to enter trommel waste streams, which when it degrades, produces hydrogen sulphide. The operator has increased monitoring to minimise this risk and rejected loads. This action supports our own auditing of waste streams.

#### **22) What is the history of waste tipped at Walleys for the last 2-3 years and can these records be made available to the public?**

Yes a request for waste return data can be made via our enquiries e-mail address:  
[enquiries\\_westmids@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries_westmids@environment-agency.gov.uk)

**23) Can the EA confirm that a new flare stack has been installed and where is its location on the site?**

A temporary flare was installed adjacent to the gas utilisation compound. This was to ensure back up capacity is available if one of the existing flares has to shut down and to allow maintenance on other infrastructure.

**Miscellaneous**

**24) Does the EA find it acceptable for residents to be breathing in landfill gases for such a prolonged period of time?**

The Permit issued to Walleys Quarry Ltd specifies the conditions the operator must adhere to.

This document outlines necessary monitoring, management, and controls required to prevent detriment to amenity and harm to human health.

We are taking the action we are and pushing the operator to remedy the situation in the shortest time possible.

**25) How can residents claim their money back for the air purifiers and medication purchased as a direct consequence of the landfill site?**

Unfortunately, we don't have an answer to this question.

**26) Are residents always offered a reference number by EA staff when they call?**

To report an odour issue related to Walleys Quarry, please [Click Here](#). This will open a template email for you to complete and send to our Incident Communications Service (ICS). If you are unable to email, please report your odour issues to us via 0800 80 70 60.

Once reports are logged, a unique reference number is generated and a copy will then go to a Regulatory Officer for the site. The incident number is a national Environment Agency reporting system (across England) for all issues for example, pollution incident or flooding. The reference numbers are not unique to calls about a specific site. The difference between your own call references does not indicate the number of calls received about a particular site.