

Underground fire at Rocky Top landfill west of Yakima could be larger than initially thought

PHIL FEROLITO Yakima Herald-Republic Jul 26, 2023



The landfill at Rocky Top can be seen from a trail on Saturday, Aug. 13, 2022, in Yakima, Wash.

Evan Abell, Yakima Herald-Republic file

An underground fire at DTG Recycle landfill on Rocky Top west of Yakima could be larger than initially suspected, the Yakima Health District said.

The underground fire is burning in a closed disposal cell of the limited-purpose landfill, which largely accepted construction and demolition waste. The health district and the state Department of Ecology discovered the underground fire in March.

In a July 18 letter to DTG officials, the Yakima Health District said thermal imaging showed the fire's expanse was possibly farther north and south of what was initially determined.

The letter also outlines a timeline for mitigation efforts to be met. In the letter, the health district said DTG had not addressed or sufficiently addressed concerns from the health district, the state Department of Ecology and Yakima Clean Air Agency.

In June, the health district [refused to renew DTG's landfill operating permit](#) because it had not obtained a permit from the clean air agency, as well as other reasons.

DTG officials declined to comment for this story.

Thermal imaging discovered settlement and cracks in areas beyond where the fire is now being investigated, suggesting that it is larger than initially thought, the letter said.

Putting out the fire

The health district has outlined the following deadlines DTG must meet in its fire mitigation efforts:

By Aug. 1, DTG must submit to regulators a timeline and completion date of the fire remediation plan.

By Aug. 15, DTG must submit a written plan to investigate the entire cell for fire activity, conduct regular surveys of settlement and submit a monitoring schedule.

As of Tuesday, the company was required to document the use of or absence of air scrubbers or any other devices to mitigate hydrogen sulfide and carbon monoxide that may be emitting from the cell and report gas probe data twice a week to the health district, Ecology and Clean Air.

DTG also is required to submit a complete fire remediation plan to regulators at least seven days before beginning soil cover work and notify regulators three days prior to conducting soil cover work.

In discussions with residents earlier this month, health officials said the plan was to smother the fire with a 3-foot layer of soil.

The landfill is sometimes called the Anderson landfill after former owner Ron Anderson, who is not to be confused with former Yakima County Commissioner Ron Anderson.

In 2022, sampling conducted by the state Department of Ecology detected hazardous chemicals — unsafe amounts of benzene and naphthalene — in the atmosphere at the landfill. This led Ecology to give the site a [Model Toxics Control Act designation](#), which requires toxic cleanup. During follow-up testing in March, regulators found the underground fire.

Daily tests over the last few months have not detected hazardous levels of the three chemicals, health officials said.

Health officials met with neighbors near the landfill earlier this month to go over [an emergency evacuation plan](#) should a mass release of hazardous chemicals occur.

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