

LU-24-027 IN-PERSON TESTIMONY SUBMITTAL COVER SHEET

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Good evening, Commissioners, my name is Kevin Higgins, 37615 Zeolite Hills Road Corvallis, about 3-1/2 miles south of the dump.

We moved to the Soap Creek area just over 50 years ago, and we have called it home ever since.

I realize this doesn't fall into the classification "Adjacent property" but the dump most definitely has affected the area as well as the Character of the Area.

A second reason for mentioning my address is I am not only a property owner in Benton County, but directly in the affected area of debate, this is contrast to the supporters we heard last night, 5, or 33% of the 15 supporters live in the county, and 0% live in the affected area and 66% don't even live in the county at all, yet they want to tell you how to vote.

I am a Retired Fire Captain from Adair Fire, was active for nearly 23 years retiring in 2022.

I am also the former Emergency Manager for Benton County, And I do still work for the county but moved to become the Special Services Manager for the Sheriff's office. To be clear, I am not here representing the Sheriffs office.

When I first started at Adair Fire, we were still having routine fires at the dump, some of them very big, multiple alarm, and many agencies needed to fight.

One fire in particular was big enough to make the Associated Press as National news in 1999. Some of those fires took all night to get out since the fire would be deep into the trash and would require us to bring a dozer in to move the trash around to get to the seat of the fire.

These fires used a HUGE amount of water to fight. The landfill folks always hated it when we started dumping thousands of gallons of water on the fire because it would throw off the leachate.

I know the fuel load in the landfill is huge, and that is why a fire there requires so many resources. Fighting a fire there is one of the worst locations to fight a fire due to all the unknown fuel load and substances burning. It is so toxic that you basically must fight the fire on air the whole time. You're wearing a SCBA pack and on air for hours, but if you don't go on air, you usually cough and feel sick for days afterwards. Who knows what that has done to each of us that have fought those fires while not being on air. I have often wondered what kind of toxins were released into the air that not only were we breathing but may have affected the environment also.

My son Levi was also a firefighter for over 10 years at Adair fire. Although he did not experience the 1999 fire, we both had similar physical effects of fighting the fire at the dump. We both experienced that our eyes got sticky and goopy and we both had burning in our lungs if we didn't stay on the SCBA air. Our lungs would burn for days after, and we would feel lethargic and sick. The smoke was thick, black and heavy. Who knows the long term effects of this.

I imagine a scenario where we had a large wildland fire that included the dump here. We would have a toxic mess on our hands. A typical wildland crew wouldn't have the equipment to fight the fire at the dump. And the structure firefighters would prioritize working exposure protection of homes and buildings. That doesn't leave many resources to fight the fire in the dump with all it's toxins pumping into the air.

Granted, Over the years, they started doing something different, because the fires frequency started to slow a bit. The last few I went to before retiring generally started in equipment operating at the dump but then would spread to the noxious trash, so we had an equipment fire and a trash fire to deal with at the same time. This often-required mutual aid from Corvallis Fire, Albany Fire and Polk County Fire to assist.

In the early days of tarping to capture and contain the methane, I can personally remember fires that were under the tarp and feeling the methane explosions under my feet. Back then, I had to personally make large cuts in the tarps themselves to release the methane buildup, so it wouldn't explode under our crew. I have heard representatives from the dump say that never happened. I can tell you it did and that I was there. I did cut the tarps, and our crews did feel the explosions!! It most definitely happened. And it was an eerie sensation to feel the explosions under your feet.

Levi had also experienced the explosions under the tarp and said that it was terrifying watching and feeling the fire hitting so many hazardous materials and seeing the fire color changes as it hit things like magnesium car parts, plastics, gas cylinders that weren't quite empty, petroleum products and who knows what else.

Landfill fires are not that uncommon, a couple notable landfill fires you should know about:

- **Moody Landfill fire (Alabama):** In 2022, a fire at the Environmental Landfill in Moody burned for over a year and was driven by illegally dumped construction waste. Lawsuits were filed by nearby residents, alleging the fire caused medical issues and reduced their property values due to widespread toxic smoke.
- **Bella Vista Stump Dump fire (Arkansas):** A fire that began in July 2018 at a stump dump burned for nearly a year. A 2022 settlement of \$6.3 million was awarded to 85 households for property damage and health issues related to the smoke.
- **Los Angeles Landfill fire (California):** An underground fire has been burning in a landfill near the Six Flags amusement park since at least early 2022. The fire has grown to 90 acres and emits toxic air into the nearby community, causing the land above to sink. A lawsuit was filed in 2025 seeking compensation for reduced property values.
- **Delta Shake and Shingle Landfill fire (British Columbia):** In 1999, an underground fire at this landfill burned for more than two months. It cost more than \$4 million (CAD) to extinguish, and a state of emergency was declared.

Dealing with fires like these have huge impacts:

- **Reduced property values:** Residential properties near landfills frequently lose value due to odor, pollution, and the stigma associated with a fire.
- **Toxic contamination:** Fires can release a variety of toxic chemicals, which can settle on homes, vehicles, and land. These emissions can also contaminate soil and groundwater.
- **Waste of resources:** As seen with the Delta Shake fire, extinguishing these types of blazes can require millions of dollars in resources.

Nationally there is an increase in fires from Lithium-Ion battery's exploding on their own. The Lithium-ion battery fire statistics from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) show fires in 64 waste facilities alone over a seven-year span, which were determined to be caused or likely caused by lithium-ion batteries and lithium metal. FDNY Says they are seeing about a 53% increase in Structure fires linked to Lithium batteries, try all you want to regulate dumping Lithium-Ion batteries, we all know that there are plenty of them that are just thrown away in the dump that could be the cause of the next big one here in Benton county.

There was a meeting a couple months back that I was part of and it was mentioned last night by a Republic Services manager, he stated that there was no conversations about the expansion or any concerns, that's because that was not what the meeting was scheduled to be about, it was an operations meeting, the how-to's of fighting the fires, what to do during red flags days, how to gain access, and how could they best monitor the dump for the signs of a fire starting.

The automated monitoring devices that he mentioned last night were also brought up during that meeting, and they indicated that the cell coverage would not allow them to use them, but I had mentioned that is not an issue with Starlink and his response was that would be too expensive... really? Too expensive? A multi Billion (that's billion with a B) dollar company does not want to pay to monitor their own site to help identify when there is a fire day or night and take care of so many of the issues that people have voiced, and to be a good neighbor? Wow... ok we understand Republic Services a lot better now.

In closing, the Higgins family moved to the Soap Creek Valley in the mid 70's. This is where I was raised, and I have memories of going to the dump as a kid looking for treasures. I was a young inventor, and the dump looked a lot different then, it was basically flat at the road height and just Benton and maybe surrounding areas dumped there. Now it is over 450' high and 22 counties and 2 states dump there.

My wife and I decided to move back to the Soap Creek Valley in the late 90's to raise our family. Our son and his wife want to move back to this area, and now that they are expecting our first grandson, that would be 4 generations and so for our family, the stakes are high. We want to protect and preserve the beauty and health of the Soap Creek Valley and of Benton County.

The whole landfill issue is exceptionally frustrating.

In 1977, Benton County approved a Solid Waste Management Plan that projected the closure of the Coffin Butte Landfill by the year 2000. With the vast majority of the people in opposition including an Oregon State Senator and State representative. I hope you choose to fulfill the commitment made to the people back in 1977 to wind down the landfill, not expand it...yet again.

What a disaster it would be to overrule the Couty Planning Commission's recommendation, as well as basically the 100% opposition to the landfill expansion you have heard here over the last couple of days, with only a couple of supportive voices, and those, all seem to be money driven, Republic Services, the county itself, a trash hauling company from an other county, and a couple of customers that are afraid of a slight increase in trash fees, but none of those even live in the area affected by this, so they too are just about the money... NOBODY else is in support of this expansion. You can be the commissioners that stopped this endless cycle of attempts to expand the dump.

We encourage you to deny this expansion and let the landfill sunset. Remember that there are plenty of cost effective, less impactful, more environmentally friendly methods of transferring trash (like via rail), and for the small additional cost we may see, we can protect our beautiful county for generations to come.

Lastly, two things. To be clear, I am 100% opposed to any expansion of the dump. And second, I looked online for Benton Counties commitment to the environment, this is what I found. It should help with your decision-making process:

"Benton County, Oregon, demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental sustainability through various initiatives and plans. The county aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect natural resources, and promote sustainable practices in areas like waste management and land use. "

The dump or its expansion clearly does not line up with that commitment. *Thank you for your time.*