

From: [Katharine Harris](#)
To: [Benton Public Comment](#)
Subject: Deny LU-24-027
Date: Tuesday, July 1, 2025 12:59:19 PM
Attachments: [Kate Plng Commission Testimony 1July25.pdf](#)

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Please see attached testimony, from Kate Harris, residing at 37268 Moss Rock Dr, Corvallis, OR 97330

The testimony attached below is a written copy of my verbal testimony, given to the Benton County Planning Commission on May 8th, 2025.

The points I made below have been additionally highlighted by continued communication, deadline and technology issues at the hands of an overwhelmed County Staff with processing the continued testimony submitted by citizens, Republic Services, and various consultants through today, July 1st, 2025. This landfill and its related operations, such as monitoring and enforcing past Conditions of Approval and land-use criteria, and most notably this expansion process, are better suited for a much larger County, with more staff-hours, a larger budget, and specific expertise with which to manage such a detailed operation. Benton County has continued to operate as if they do not have the expertise or consultants to evaluate additional testimony submitted by Republic Services, and therefore choose to trust what is being presented to them, despite numerous examples of falsities engrained in Republic's submissions.

As just one additional example of falsities, in the additional documentation submitted by Republic Services in June, 2025, the Fire Expert stated that a fire could never occur in the truck refueling area, which did indeed occur on April 6th, 2025.

How are Benton County staff and commissioners verifying the truth of all information submitted by Republic Services? We've pointed out numerous instances of deliberate or accidental inaccuracies, but what else is also untrue and misleading to the future health, safety, and financial prosperity of Benton County? If you are unsure of this, it is your duty to deny any additional expansion until all information can be confirmed as true and accurate.

Sincerely, Maj Kate Harris

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Verbal Testimony, May 8th, 2025:

Chair Fowler and members of the Planning Commission, my name is Major Kate Harris, a former Air Force Evaluator Pilot with a degree in Civil Engineering, a Masters in Public Administration, formerly on a Hospital Board of Directors, and most importantly the mother to 3 young children who were present at the Tuesday hearing, and I live at 37268 Moss Rock Dr, Corvallis.

I am here today in strong opposition of the Coffin Butte Landfill expansion and to demonstrate that any expansion will impose an undue burden on services available to the area per BCC 53.215. I will be discussing four topics, The Burden of Truth, Spin Doctors, The Burden of Safety, and The People's Burden.

You've already heard or read arguments discussing burden placed on transportation, the health and livability of the air and water sources, usability of the area for recreation, as well as others. Tonight, I will be discussing the primary burden that the current expansion is placing on services available to the area. Namely, the requirement of thousands of citizen and county staff hours, which have been dedicated to interpreting Republic's application to determine what is true, what has been omitted, and was is deceitful.

The complexity of this operation and application have completely overwhelmed the capacity of Benton County's own staff. Despite the kind and thoughtful members on staff, technology and communication problems have been present throughout this process, continuing even to several emails I received coordinating this slot to speak. It is no wonder that the County has NOT been able to enforce prior Conditions of Approval if they can't even manage the technology and communication requirements it takes to consider such a complex

application for such complex operations. [Inga Williams, in her former role as County Associate Planner, stated in an email that she could not include Coffin Butte Landfill in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan because she did not have the knowledge to do so.]

Within the Staff Report for this application, there are numerous cases where the staff states it does not have the capacity to evaluate certain details, and therefore can provide no additional comment on that section. Given this, how can you expect the Staff to have the capacity to ascertain what parts of the application are accurate, omitted, or deceitful?

One example of the need to determine the truth is from the applicant's *Fire Risk Assessment, update from September 2024* page 3, in reference to the garbage and hydraulic lifter fire on May 18th, 2024, "Adair Fire was on standby at the site but not needed to actively engage the fire." This is outright false, as pictures from that event clearly show two simultaneous water streams being applied to the tippers by Adair Volunteer Firefighters. These pictures have been available on social media for nearly a year, not hidden on somebody's phone.

Another example, referencing the 1999 fire, the risk assessment states, "On-site staff was joined by the local fire department, Adair Rural Fire and Rescue (Adair Fire), which assisted to extinguish the fire after several hours," whereas the Associated Press and personnel reports discuss this fire burning for more than 24-hours. Per Webster's Dictionary referenced by Mr. Kleinman, *several* is defined as "more than two but fewer than many". In this case, it is deceitful for the applicant to claim the 1999 fire was "extinguished after several hours."

Approving this application places an undue burden on the entire county, until you the Planning Commission can ascertain

what components are accurate, have been omitted, or are deceitful, whether intentionally or not. It is also impossible to determine the level of undue burdens that will be imposed by the actual expansion if the application doesn't include full truths.

If the truth of this application is in such question, what are we left to believe about reports on the ongoing operations of this landfill, as Republic's supposedly most profitable landfill? In just one area of operations, methane leaks, we are still waiting to see what the EPA has to say on the reliability of Republic's self-reported information.

Which brings me to Spin Doctors. I would like to introduce you to two people from Republic Services – key players on their team: Ginger Richardson (sometimes appearing as Ginger Rough) and Russ Knocke. They are on a special team at Republic Services – Information Control. The common term is “spin doctors.”

Commissioner Biscoe may remember them from the Talks Trash workgroup. Ginger Richardson participated throughout BCTT and Russ Knocke appeared from time to time.

Commissioners, we'll introduce into evidence at least one document from that time, showing the spin doctors at work. What happened was, a member of the Subcommittee studying landfill life proposed that the Subcommittee's report should include a section on the dump closing early because of environmental violations. The scenario he imagined had to do with excessive methane emissions. Our evidence shows that Ginger Richardson urged the BCTT Facilitator to strike all evidence of that idea from the BCTT record. To make it appear as if it had never been said.

We didn't know at the time that the EPA had already begun its investigation of Coffin Butte Landfill for excessive methane emissions. Republic successfully hid that event from everyone for over a year, until reporter Tracy Loew broke the story in the Salem Statesman Journal in the fall of 2023. She found out by using the Freedom of Information Act. We will enter all of Tracy Loew's reporting into the record.

You may note that Ginger Richardson's name appears here and there in Republic's application. You may not realize that her presence shows itself nearly everywhere in Republic's communications. We'll introduce evidence detailing how the company's communications have been crafted to spin the facts and obscure the truth. I think that evidence will go on and on, but we urge you to read it all.

Tonight, my time is limited, so I'll just point out two examples.

First, this statement from the Application: that the dump has "three times the industry standard" of wells extracting landfill gas. This is brought forward as a proud achievement – Commissioners, it is anything but.

Here's how the regulatory system works: If a landfill finds a methane leak, the operators have 10 days to remediate that leak. That is, they try to fix it, then test again in 10 days. If they haven't fixed it, the operators then have more 30 days to fix it. So they test again in 30 days to see if it's still leaking. If it is, if the operators fail to control the leak, the regulations require them to drill a new well right there, to try to at least reduce the pressure to that unmitigated leak.

Once you know that, the 300-plus gas wells at Coffin Butte Landfill are an unmistakable sign of widespread failure of the dump's gas collection system to stop uncontrolled emissions of

landfill gas. And the millions of dollars Republic has spent drilling all those wells is put into its proper regulatory context. We'll introduce into evidence a detailed breakdown of that failure.

My second example is how "the life of the landfill" is portrayed throughout Republic's communications. Simply put, it's portrayed as if the dump will run at full speed until it's full – as though annual intake volume is a set number, out of anyone's control.

Commissioners, the annual intake volume is not a set number. It is a dynamic number, set entirely by Republic. The truth is, for Benton County residents, the life of disposal service is through the year 2040 – that is, we have guaranteed service for 15 more years. That's ironclad, it's in the franchise agreement. And that number has nothing to do, actually, with the dump. If the dump closes tomorrow, the life of disposal service for Benton County residents is through the year 2040.

You can see how it benefits Republic Services to spin "life of the landfill" this way. It's so they can constantly raise the specter of the dump filling up, and Benton County suddenly having no place to put its garbage. Republic has been relentless on this spin, and largely successful at duping the public into thinking there's a crisis of capacity looming just ahead. We'll introduce evidence of this spin throughout time. – The truth is, Benton County government has done its job, and Benton County residents are legally protected – well, as much as anyone can be legally protected from a company with a market cap of \$79 billion.

Republic is really worried about two issues with the dump expansion in particular: the pollutants methane and arsenic. As you review the letters submitted in Republic's Burden of Proof – the half-legal, half-technical one about methane emissions, on page 119, and the definitely technical one about arsenic, on page 121, please note that they are not signed by engineers or technical people. They are signed by Ginger Richardson.

So, Commissioners, when you look at the materials Republic provides for you – especially their upcoming rebuttal to public testimony – please keep in mind who’s writing them.

My third topic tonight is the Burden of Safety. As a former combat, instructor and evaluator pilot in the Air Force, Safety was absolute priority. We would cancel combat sorties and Presidential Coverage missions if pre-flight mechanical or personnel safety concerns arose. Safety is no joking matter. We also worked incredibly hard to build and promote an overarching culture of safety, in which all ranks were taught and encouraged to speak up and report any safety concerns that they saw, regardless of mission status, both in the plane and in everyday work. The goal of this was to encourage all of our decisions to be viewed through a safety mindset, with the very real outcome of preventing airplane crashes. It was also to normalize reporting of systemic issues, so that we could discuss and remedy them before they led to catastrophic failures. This safety mindset is also applied in hospital systems. Our local hospital system believes so strongly in a safety mindset culture, that they host daily safety huddles, as well as begin formal meetings with a “Safety Moment” to discuss something that occurred, or nearly occurred, to allow everyone to learn from the situation in hopes of preventing future harm. The hospital has based their safety culture on best practices from other high risk industries, most notably aviation, submarines, and nuclear reactors.

In such a high-risk operation as landfilling at Coffin Butte, with far-reaching consequences, particularly one which contains nuclear waste, disposes of leachate in a drinking water resource, and covers nearby communities in unknown gases, I would expect nothing less than ensuring they operate with a comprehensive safety mindset. All of these side-effects cause undue burdens on

the local services and community, and I will propose that their lack of operating with a safety mindset poses additional undue burdens on local facilities and services.

In Republic's Coffin Butte Landfill Operating Procedures, dated April 2013, which is quoted verbatim in Appendix 20 to this application, Fire Risk Assessment, Step 5 of Section 8.1 States, "In case of a fire...The DEQ is notified of the event" and Section 8.2 states, "Emergencies regarding fire or leachate excursions are reported to the DEQ".

From Republic's Coffin Butte Safety webpage, "Safety is our top priority and a core value at Republic Services. And it's tied to another of our core values, to be human-centered."

If Republic operated in a safety-mindset manner, they would be more than happy to submit all of the documentation of all fires and leachate excursions reported as required to DEQ. Yet when I presented fire safety questions to DSAC last September, Bret Davis could not tell DSAC how many fires they had recently, nor did he offer to simply collect all of the DEQ notifications that are submitted per their operations plan. And, has there been any followup about the most recent leachate excursion as queried by Joel Geier (like Meyer) to the DEQ over the past few months? It's astonishing to me that we have not seen any evidence of Post-Event Reports or After Action Reports from Republic, detailing each and every fire they have, what the cause was, how it was handled, and how future fires might be prevented. After Action Reports, or the like, are standard practice in high-risk industries that do indeed operate with safety in mind.

Without documentation showing an accurate history of the safety events that have occurred at Coffin Butte & the actions taken by Republic to minimize their future occurrences, the Planning Commission cannot accurately know or determine the extent of

undue burden that are placed on local facilities and services by this operation or by any expansion.

In addition to those three academic points, I must also include discussion of The People's Burden. I, along with so many of my neighbors, have spent countless hours over the past four years highlighting the local burdens imposed by this monstrous operation. We have ignored our families, gotten kids to bed too late, missed work, neglected growing pot holes and exploding poison oak groves to focus on not allowing this community burden to grow any larger. Erin Brockovich did not become famous because her fight was short or easy. We would all prefer to get back to tackling our plumes of poison oak and back-breaking pot-hole filing than drag this on, capture additional National attention and become Brockovich or Flint Michigan 2.0.

My 11 year old son and 9 year old daughter were brave enough to speak to the State of Oregon House Committee on Climate, Energy & Environment, last week, requesting additional comprehensive methane monitoring for Oregon Landfills to help ensure safe air where they live and go to school, adding burden to them, by missing school. They both hoped to speak tonight, but ceded their time to me since they will likely need to be asleep before their slot time and we were not allowed to swap their time to earlier. They were going to speak about the burden on their Grandparents, who purchased a home in Adair in 1974, sold that house & bought a house on Tampico in 1995. Based on the 1977 Solid Waste Management Plan, the county expected the landfill to close in 2000. This was confirmed yet again in 1983 and 1994, giving my in-laws expectations that their property purchase closer to Coffin Butte would be a safe financial and health decision. This expansion would bring the landfill closer to their property, where they live with my children's young cousins, and closer to the house where my 3 young children are growing up, seriously interfering with the health and safety of all of our family's local

property, that we all wish to leave to these future generations. If this landfill continues to expand and operate in an unsafe manner, our families must make hard decisions if we intend to stay in our homes or move to seek healthier locations.

Please consider the content of this application carefully, and deny it until and unless you can verify it's truth and completeness as you evaluate future burdens.

Sincerely,
Maj Kate Harris