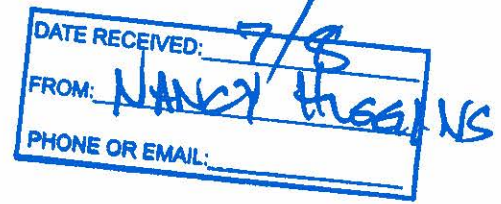


I am Speaker #10

Two people ceded their time to me

Marge Popp #13 and Josh Dodson #25

Intro.....



I am reading a letter from my husband, Kevin Higgins. Kevin is a retired fire captain. He served over 20 years at the Adair Rural Fire Dept., retiring in 2022.

He also is the former Emergency Manager for Benton County. He moved on to become the Special Services Manager for the Sheriffs Office and due to a schedule conflict he is unable to be in person tonight. Kevin was asked to share his experiences with fires at the dump. The following letter is from Kevin.

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 particular fire 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 often require us to bring a dozer in to move the trash around to get to 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 substances burning. It is so toxic that you basically have to 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 we were breathing but may have affected the environment also.

My son Levi and I both wanted to communicate to you the physical effects of fighting the fire on 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. Levi also experienced the explosions under the tarp and said that it was terrifying watching the fire hitting so many hazardous materials and seeing the fire color changes as it hit car parts, plastic and even petroleum products. The smoke was thick, black and heavy.

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. 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 of it's toxins.

Over the years, they started doing something different, because the fires started to decrease in frequency. The last few I went to started in equipment operating at the dump but then would spread to the noxious trash so we had and 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, 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 didn't explode on our crew. I have heard representatives from the dump say that never happened. I can tell you that I was there. I did cut the tarps, and our crew felt the explosions!! It most definitely happened. It was an eerie sensation to feel the weight of the dump exploding under your feet.

I have heard testimony from supposed experts that say that since 1999 there have only been a very few fires at the dump. I am also reporting that is not true. I don't remember seeing those experts up there and I have no idea where they are getting their information. We had no less than two fires per year for many years, and every fire is dangerous because you have no idea what is burning and what is going to be burning next. Now granted, there were fires that were in the equipment that didn't spread to the trash in the dump itself. That was mostly because we were able to be timely in our response and quickly contain the fire to the equipment.

The Higgins family moved to the Soap Creek Valley in the early 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. 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 are considering this as well. 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 frustrating, and the expansion is all about greed.

I hope the commissioners are smart enough to fulfill the commitment made by previous commissioners to wind down the landfill, not expand it...yet again,. What a disaster it would be for them to overrule basically 100% opposition to the landfill, with only 3 supportive voices, and those three are all money driven the Republic Services, and the county itself, and trash hauling company in an outside county . NOBODY else was in support.

In closing, 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 in 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. "