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Coakley Landfill Group to pay up to $210K for deep bedrock analysis

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PORTSMOUTH -- It will cost the Coakley Landfill Group an estimated $165,000 to $210,000 to conduct a deep bedrock investigation at the Superfund cleanup site in North Hampton and Greenland.

Portsmouth Environmental Planner Peter Britz, who also works for the CLG, offered the estimate during an interview this week and then added, "at least that."

Britz and City Attorney Robert Sullivan, who chairs the CLG's executive committee, said work on the investigation has begun.

The Environmental Protection Agency instructed the CLG to conduct the study because of the number of homes and business around the site who "rely on deep bedrock wells for potable water," they said in a 2017 community update. "Bedrock fractures represent a potential contaminant migration pathway," for contaminants like PFAS chemicals and 1,4-dioxane, the EPA added in the update.

The landfill accepted waste from 1972 to 1982 and then incinerator waste until 1985.

People living around the site are concerned that chemicals leaching from the landfill will contaminate their residential wells.

Tests done on groundwater in monitoring wells at the site have found PFOS levels as high as 1,108 parts per trillion, according to state Department of Environmental Services and the EPA, and 1,4-dioxane over its health advisory level. The EPA's health advisory for PFAS chemicals is 70 parts per trillion. Both PFAS chemicals and 1,4-dioxane are suspected carcinogens.

Testing of private residential wells has found PFAS chemicals at levels only below the health advisory.

Sullivan has repeatedly said the CLG, which is made up of municipalities and companies who used the landfill or transported waste there, has spent about $27 million on remediation at the site. But besides the executive committee's votes on spending at the site, there has not been an annual accounting of how the money has been spent.

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The city of Portsmouth, at about 53 percent, is responsible for the largest share of the CLG's costs.

Monies are kept in two different trusts, one for Operable Unit 1, which are costs related to the landfill site itself. The balance in that trust as of Feb. 16 is $24,263, according to minutes of the CLG's most recent executive committee meeting.

There second trust is for Operable Unit 2, which is for costs outside of the site. The balance in that trust as of Feb. 16 is $441,271, according to the meeting minutes.

Despite being closed for about 27 years, the CLG continues to spend money on the landfill's remediation and continues to issue "assessments," which are bills it sends to CLG members to replenish the trusts. In the case of the municipalities, the assessments are paid by taxpayers.

For example, there were a number of OU-2 related assessments due to the CLG by March 1, according to the meeting minutes. They included $219,559 from the city of Portsmouth, $22,398 from the town of Newington, $16,658 from the town of North Hampton, $82,000 from the generators group, $50,462 from Browning Ferris Industries and $18,921 from Waste Management, according to the meeting minutes.

Jim Murphy, the team leader for government relations and community involvement from the EPA's region 1, said it will likely take about two years until the bedrock investigation is complete. At that point, the EPA, in conjunction with NHDES officials, will decide what remediation if any the agencies will order the CLG to provide for the PFAS chemicals at the site and in nearby Berry's Brook, and for the 1,4-dioxane at the site, Murphy said Thursday.

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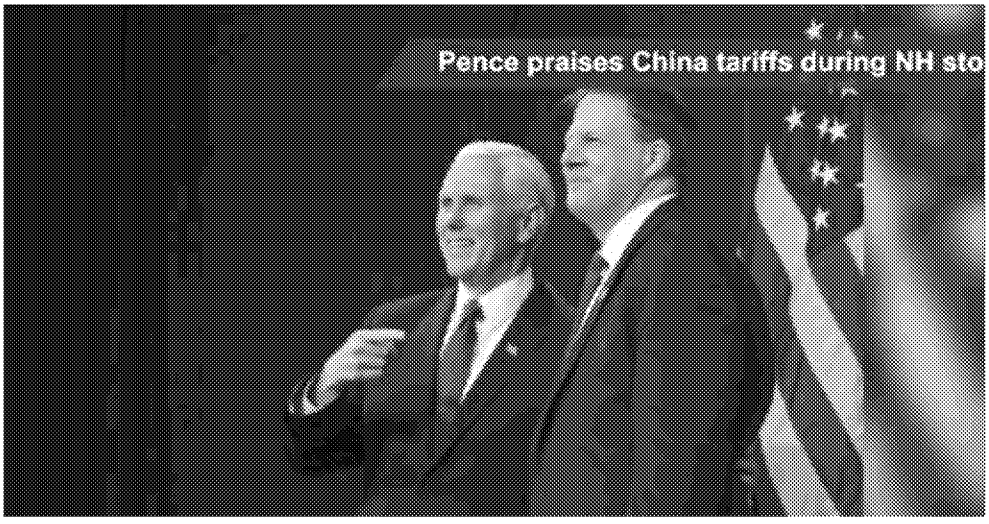

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