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Fike comments on leachate dumping in Marion wastewater lagoon

Jackie Fike remembers how his neighborhood was before leachate from the Arrowhead Landfill began being pumped into the lagoon near his home on Moore Street. “We never had any problems, and you could breathe deep out in your own yard.”

Now, Fike says the odors and fumes are destroying the quality of life for him and his neighbors. According to Fike, the main odor, a “tire-like” smell, is causing locals to have breathing problems, nausea, headaches, and other health issues. He said he suffers from headaches and feeling not quite like himself at times now. His wife was on oxygen even before the arrival of the leachate, but her dosage per minute has increased from two or three liters per minute to upwards of four or five liters per minute. He said they can decrease her oxygen intake when he takes her out, but it must be increased when they come home.

Fike said the problems started back in the summer when the leachate started arriving. In recent weeks, trucks have been arriving “nearly 24/7. A neighbor said he was coming in from work one night at three in the morning and saw one of the trucks coming up the hill.” For the last several days, however, Fike said he had not seen any trucks at all.

He also expressed concern for the drivers of these trucks. He said they are not wearing proper safety equipment and especially need to be wearing respirators because of the fumes involved during the pumping process. Fike said he worked in the environmental clean-up industry and knows the dangers involved. He pointed to rough places on his hands that he said are partially the result of exposure to chemicals while cleaning up oil, gas, and other chemical spills. “I know what I’m talking about with this stuff. I’ve got the cards in my pocket to prove it,” he said.

Fike said the long-term environmental impact for local residents, however, is his biggest concern. He saw the construction of the lagoon in question many years ago, and to the best of his knowledge it was built “just like a farm pond” with no liner. He said he had been told that a white foam on top of the pond was the result of something being put into the water to combat the smell, combined with the action of an aerator. Recently, however, he said the white foam had gotten chunky and had formed sizeable pieces. Fike said that the supposed efforts to make the odor more bearable were a bit misguided since the smell could be gone while the pollutants would remain in the sediment on the bottom of the lagoon. Fike suggested someone would eventually have to dig the bottom of the pond out and then bury all the contaminated dirt somewhere safer.

In the meantime, Fike points to anecdotal evidence of environmental damage. He said the lagoon used to be full of snakes and turtles and even had a few fish in it. Since July, however, the wildlife has disappeared from the lagoon, and he and his neighbors have been overrun with snakes in their yards. He said he also sees fewer birds than he used to.

Fike wants the problems corrected and life to go back to what it was in his neighborhood. He also said he wanted to make sure people in other parts of the county realize that water table pollution in one part of the county could also affect them. He said there is a bigger picture than just what happens with the leachate being dumped into the lagoon on Moore Street in Marion. “The people of Perry County have to stick together and do what’s right,” he said.



A worker releases leachate from the Arrowhead Landfill into an access point at the Marion wastewater lagoon on December 2, 2009. The leachate goes into a pipe which crosses the road before emptying out into the lagoon. The disposal of the leachate is at the center of legal action brought by environmental lawyer David Ludder on behalf of Marion resident Jackie Fike. The suit alleges the disposal is done in violation of required permits and is producing an odor hazard for residents.