

Trash talk

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Earlier this year, a group of residents with property near Dothan's proposed landfill expansion asked the Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the Alabama Department of Environmental Management's approval of a permit for the expansion.

That effort appears to have paid off. Recently, ADEM rescinded and revoked its permit, citing the city's failure to identify all adjoining landowners during the application process. As a result, ADEM was unable to fulfill its requirement to notify all adjoining landowners, as required by law. Of the 17 adjacent landowners, two received no notification.

It's easy to dismiss the complaints of neighboring residents. The proposed expansion would take place adjacent to the existing landfill, which has been in operation in the same area for many years. In other words, an expansion wouldn't be expected to generate anything objectionable that isn't already there.

However, there are laws in place that are meant to protect the interests of adjacent landowners, as well as ensure that landfill construction meets strict regulations with regard to environmental issues. The city failed in providing complete information regarding neighbors, and resulting notification failure invalidates the permit.

The city must go back to the drawing board on the landfill issue. However, instead of jumping immediately back into the permit application process, city officials should review the various roadblocks encountered in the quest to expand the existing landfill and weigh those obstacles against the pros and cons of getting out of the landfill business entirely. It may well be the case that contracting with a commercial landfill may be more cost-effective in the long run.