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Report: Cost to extinguish landfill fire at \$2.8 million, EMC to hear from public on Moody fire

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As of Jan. 27, ADEM on site inspector reported that approximately 8 dump trucks/ 75 cubic yards of fill being uploaded per hour and BMP's are installed around the site.

ADEM

As the underground landfill fire burning in St. Clair County moves into its third month, the Environmental Management Commission will meet 11 a.m. Feb. 10, to hear from the public after it concludes its regular business. The expected questions at that time will be concerns and updates about ongoing operations now that the Environmental Protection Agency has taken over the responsibility for extinguishing the fire.

Organizations planning on voicing opinions include the Environmental Defense Alliance (environmentaldefensealliance.org), GASP (gaspgroup.org), and Cahaba Riverkeeper (cahabariverkeeper.org). These organizations are required to include in their requests a description of their intended presentation. Requests to speak were due to be submitted Jan. 27.

Attorney David A. Ludder said that he intends to offer a presentation during that time. Ludder is a former general counsel of ADEM and the Legal Environmental Assistance Foundation and is now in private practice.

Ludder said his presentation will state that ADEM has mistakenly claimed that it lacks authority to regulate the land disposal of stumps, logs, tree limbs, brush, yard trimmings, leaves or other vegetative debris and will urge the commission to advise the ADEM Director Lance R. LeFleur to regulate the disposal of such wastes and to adopt rules for the proper disposal of such wastes.

LeFleur's office did not respond to a request by The News-Aegis for a clarification of Ludder's proposal by deadline of this article.

The fire in Moody, now declared a limited state of emergency and under the direction of the EPA, has been burning at least since Nov. 25, 2022. The site, located at the Environmental Landfill, Inc., in Moody covers about 20 acres. The landfill was largely unregulated by ADEM because it was mandated to accept only green waste consisting of things such as trees and vegetation. ADEM has since reported finding other materials, such as construction waste, at the site.

Federal environmental regulators have estimated the cost of extinguishing the fire at \$2.8 million, with funds coming from the EPS's regional fund for emergency response, according to the Associated Press. The EPA took over the fire in January after air samples indicated elevated levels of chemicals that could be dangerous to the public.

Highlights of the Moody landfill fire, provided by ADEM

- In November 2022, Moody Fire Department responded to, but was unable to extinguish, an underground fire at a vegetative waste disposal site outside of the city.
- ADEM, Alabama Forestry Commission and St. Clair County EMA consulted with Moody Fire Department about the fire.
- ADEM reviewed legal authority required to take action on the fire.
- St. Clair County Commission acknowledged responsibility for putting out fire.
- ADEM connected St. Clair County Commission with companies who have expertise in extinguishing underground fires.
- St. Clair County lacked legal authority to do or pay for work on private property and lacked fiscal resources to hire a contractor to extinguish the fire.
- St. Clair County declared state of emergency.
- St. Clair County evaluated proposals for extinguishing the fire, but determined it lacked expertise to choose best approach.
- ADEM requested EPA to perform air monitoring at and near site of fire, to identify impacts to the community, and to facilitate EPA becoming involved in extinguishing the fire.
- After reviewing air monitoring data, ADEM requested EPA take the lead in extinguishing the fire because of their experience in dealing with underground fires.
- Gov. Kay Ivey declared a limited state of emergency to assist the St. Clair County Commission on Jan. 18.
- EPA agreed to provide its contractor to extinguish the fire on Jan. 19.
- Work has begun to extinguish the fire. This method involves using heavy equipment to expose the burning material then smothering with soil.
- The contractor estimates it will require approximately a month to extinguish the fire. Water Quality monitoring in nearby water sources is being performed.

ADEM on-site inspector report as of Jan. 27

- Approximately 8 dump trucks/ 75 cubic yards of fill being uploaded per hour.
- BMP's are installed around the site.
- Very little smoke can be seen.
- On-scene contractor reporting that 75% of the smoke has been contained.

EPA on-scene coordinator data as of Jan. 27

- Approximately 45% of grading has been initiated.
- Approximately 20% of cover has been initiated.