

# Old landfill site could cost county

Sullivan may be required to clean up environmental damage at abandoned site

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**BLOUNTVILLE** - An old landfill causing environmental damage could cost Sullivan County and its taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars, officials fear.

Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation officials contacted local leaders last year indicating that the privately owned landfill has been contaminating soil in Blountville.

The 60-acre landfill, off state Route 394 between Interstate 81 and U.S. Highway 11W, handled local waste from 1980-94.

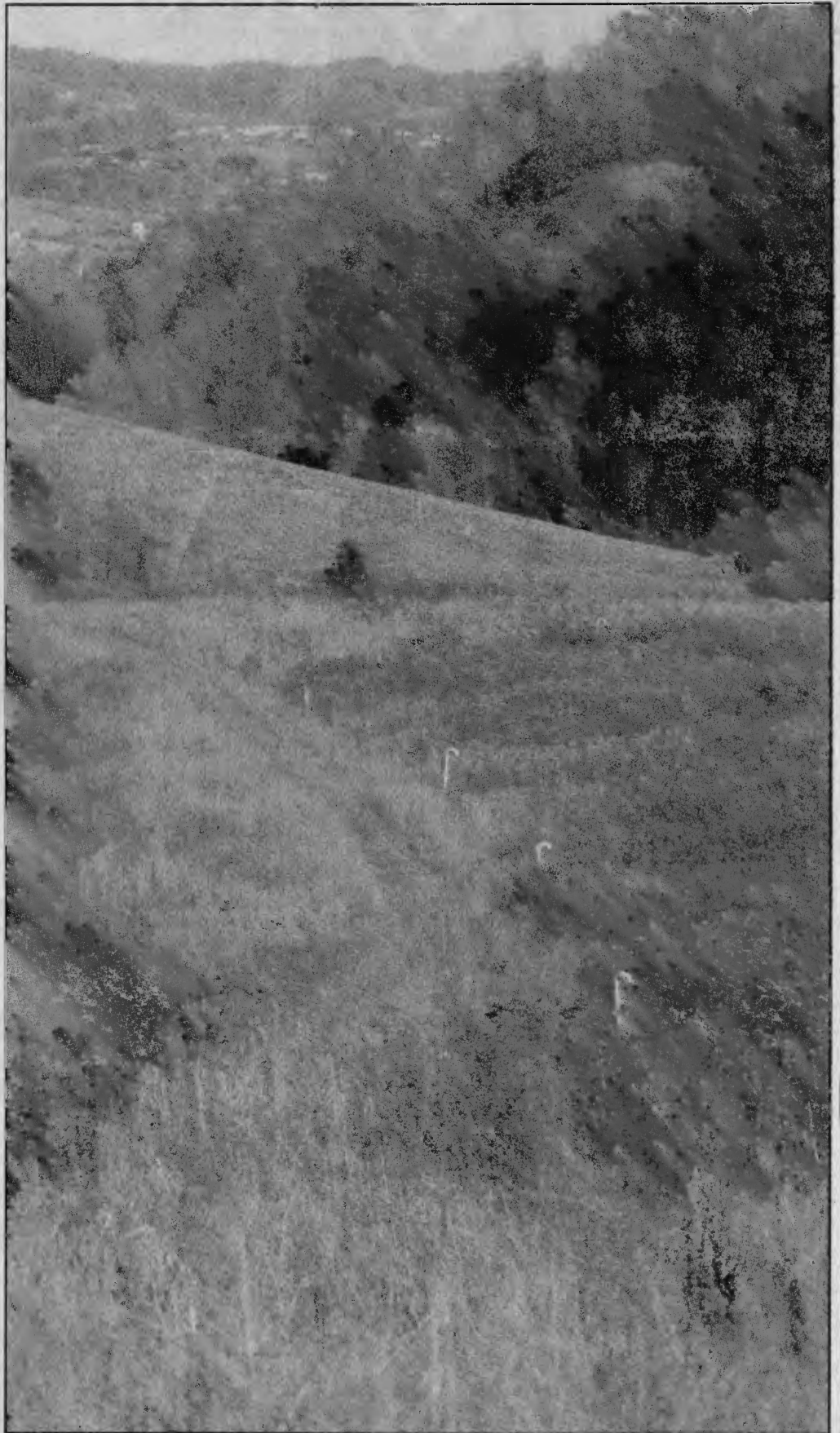
It closed after reaching capacity, and \$1 million was put into an escrow account to pay for post-closure monitoring, according to county Mayor Richard Venable.

At the time, the law did not require landfills to have liners between the garbage and the soil or to have any means to collect, leached fluids.

Tisha Calabrese-Benton, a spokeswoman for the Department of Environment and Conversation, said state officials remain uncertain exactly what kind and how much damage has taken place.

They've been conducting a study to determine exactly what needs to be done, she said. Testing on local wells and springs has shown no contamination of drinking water, she said.

"(The department) has taken great strides in doing groundwater and drinking water surveys around the area to make sure any contamination has not and does not migrate into a drinking water supply," Calabrese-Benton said.



A row of methane gas vent pipes runs along the slope of the old Sullivan County Landfill.

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# COST: Sullivan may face cleanup at old landfill

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Part of correcting the problem would require removal of the leachate, which would have to be run through a sewage processing system, she said.

The corporation that ran the landfill has gone out of business, and the owner has died. Environment and Conversation officials have told the mayor that the county and its cities will be responsible for the cleanup, but he said he would look into the legal aspects further.

"In no way has the county accepted (Environment and Conversation's) assertion that it's our responsibility," he said.

Bill Sorah, deputy city manager for operations in Bristol, said city officials there also were examining the liability issue. He said too many unanswered questions remain as to who would do the cleanup and how much it would cost.

"At this point, there are far more unknowns than there are knowns," he said.

Calabrese-Benton said Environment and Conversation officials aren't looking to place blame on anyone.

"Our concern is what needs to get done at the site gets corrected," she said. "We need to figure out how much it'll cost to fix and then from there make our next steps."

A Bluff City company called EcoSafe LLC has proposed a solution. In ex-

change for the purchase or trade of 67 acres of county-owned land adjacent to the old landfill, the company has offered to build a new landfill and clean up the old one.

Gary Rader, a partner in EcoSafe, told county commissioners last week that regardless of who would be liable, the problem needs to be corrected.

"I think I can eliminate a public health problem in the future," he said. "It's a ticking time bomb. Getting the leachate and the trash out is the best step right now."

Venable, the county mayor, said the \$1 million in escrow would not be enough to clean up the problem.

EcoSafe's proposal could save the county and cities a lot of trouble, he said.

"It could remove a contingent liability from the county for maintenance of the old landfill," he said. "It could save us hundreds of thousands of dollars and maybe millions of dollars. It's something we could do on behalf on the taxpayers from keeping our tax rate from jumping."

Venable said some of the proposal's details would have to be worked out.

"We want to make sure we're protected," he said. "There's a lot more to be said in the future about what assurances the county gets."

Commissioners could consider a resolution at their Nov. 21 meeting whether to allow EcoSafe access to the county's 67 acres for testing

for the potential new landfill.

The land now serves as training ground for the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office.

If the proposal does not gain acceptance or if EcoSafe finds the land unsuitable, Venable said he expects disagreements among the county and cities about who bears the most liability for the landfill's problems.

Landfill records indicate Bristol, Kingsport, the county and Waste Management, a company in Johnson City, all used the landfill during a period of six months toward the end of the landfill's operation, Venable said.

Records from other years cannot be found.

"If we do have to come up with tax money to treat that, I can see a lot of disagreement on who used it, how much and things of that nature," the mayor said. "We might avert that if we can build a state-of-the-art landfill."

Today, Sullivan County ships its garbage to private landfills in Hawkins and Washington counties.

Having a new landfill in Blountville could save the cost of transporting the waste, which adds up to 10 percent of the expenditure, Venable said.

He said he doesn't know whether the issue can be settled this month, but he hopes a solution can be found.

"Any tax money we'd have to put in there would be too much," he said.