

## **12/18/18: Trash piling up at regional plant and being hauled out of state after catastrophic equipment failure**

Garbage is piling up in Hartford's South Meadows and being hauled out of state at high cost after catastrophic equipment failure at the regional trash-to-energy plant.

The plant has not burned garbage for several weeks.

"At some point, we will run out of room," Thomas Kirk, head of the Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority (MIRA), said Monday. "We hope that will not occur (before equipment repairs are completed). I wouldn't use 'crisis,' but it's a very tenuous situation and we're working hard to make sure it doesn't become a crisis."

One turbine could be back in service in early to mid-January. Meanwhile, to divert some of the daily stream of incoming waste, the quasi-public state agency turned to Manchester, one of the few communities in Southern New England with an operating landfill. But town General Manager Scott Shanley said local leaders, including Mayor Jay Moran, oppose accepting any of the plant's waste and there will be no agreement.

Manchester board of directors Minority Leader Cheri Eckbreth said earlier that the town should reject any bailout.

"I'm firmly a 'no' to any political expedient, quid pro quo at the expense of Manchester residents and their health and well-being," Eckbreth said. "The state shut down town incinerators and banned MSW (municipal solid waste) from our landfills. Given their policies, they should have been prepared for an emergency with a backup system."

The problem started on Nov. 5. after a scheduled shutdown of one of the plant's two turbines, an oil pump failed and the other turbine broke down, Kirk said. Now, both turbines are in St. Louis for repairs.

Garbage is being hauled to Massachusetts, upstate New York and as far away as Virginia at a cost of about \$115 a ton, Kirk said. The agency also is storing garbage at its 83-acre South Meadows location.

The successor agency to Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority, MIRA has contracts to receive solid waste from 51 communities at \$72 a ton and also accepts garbage from other towns. Typically, Kirk said, the plant takes in 2,000 to 3,000 tons a day. To stem intake while the turbines are down, however, MIRA is only accepting garbage from its contracted municipalities, he said.

Still, finding sites that will accept the garbage and trucking outfits that will transport it is a constant problem, Kirk said.

Manchester's landfill was a possible, short-term solution. Shanley, who also sits on MIRA's board of directors, e-mailed the town board of directors on Friday, detailing the equipment failure and the possibility of Manchester accepting a test load of shredded, partially dried garbage to determine, among other factors, how easily it could be buried and how bad it would smell. State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection officials, Shanley wrote, said they would consider emergency land-filling permits.

"What I am looking to do is demonstrate good faith, as a land-filling partner with the state, that we gave the emergency request a good look," Shanley wrote to the board.

However, he also wrote in a separate email, "It is clearly not something that staff wants to accommodate, given the project currently ongoing and the upset to operations."

Shanley was referring to ongoing work meant to quell a chronic stench from the landfill that periodically envelopes the western side of town. Installation of wells designed to capture and burn off methane and other pungent gases is months behind schedule. Adding the region's stink on top of the local stink is not a good idea, said Eckbreth, a resident of the part of town that gets the worst of the smell.

Also, she noted in an email to Shanley that the landfill has not accepted household waste for years. Instead, Manchester charges fees for dumping of commercial waste such as building materials. The fees fund curbside pickup of residents' trash, recyclables, yard waste and bulky materials. Household waste should not be added to the landfill mix, Eckbreth said.

"Opening the door to receiving any of these materials, opens the door to receiving more of these materials," she wrote.

On Monday, Shanley sent an email to regional and state leaders who are dealing with the plant shut-down and accumulating waste.

"While recognizing the emergency for the region and state is real, Manchester's board is first and foremost concerned for the town residents and any potential impact (of taking in household garbage) at this sensitive time in our landfill operations," he wrote. "Had we not had the issues we have had with gasses and odors (including this weekend) and, the sloth-like workmanship of our contractor, the board may have been in a different position."

Kirk said he will accept Manchester's decision and will not try to force a deal by appealing to state officials. In any case, DEEP Commissioner Robert Klee said he does not believe his agency can require Manchester to accept municipal waste, since it is not currently permitted to accept that type of waste now.

Klee and Robert Isner, director of DEEP's waste engineering and enforcement division, said MIRA may use four other waste-to-energy facilities in the state – in Bristol, Bridgeport, Preston and Lisbon – or continue to ship the waste out of state.

"If we reached a point where MIRA was to come to the agency and say they have explored every existing option and there is no way to allow for the daily pickup of garbage to occur, Isner said, "then we would have to look at additional options. But that condition does not exist right now."

MIRA will continue to export garbage and store it in every available space at its Maxim Road site until the repaired turbines are back on line, Kirk said.

"Right now, " he said, "we are storing a tremendous amount of waste at our site and we'll continue to exploit that option and hopefully the turbines will get back before we run out of space."

The facility, which has been operating as a garbage-to-energy plant since 1988, has been encountering frequent maintenance problems. In January, state officials announced a plan to renovate and upgrade the plant, which handles about 900,000 tons of garbage each year. About 35 percent of that trash is now being recycled, and proposals for improving the plant would increase the recycling rate from 55 percent to a high of 75 percent, state officials have said.