

Three Longtime Polluters Flout the Law: Environmental happenings from ecoRI News

A lack of urgency and a deference to business interests by Rhode Island officials have allowed these three high-profile pollution problems to fester for more than a decade.

Truk-Away Landfill. The Warwick landfill closed in 1978 and operated before strict regulations were in place. No one knows for sure what is buried beneath its 36 acres. Remediation efforts during the past 43 years have amounted to no more than 2 feet of loam being spread on top of this site, which is loaded with harmful materials.

The list of material dumped there is long and concerning — medical waste, electrical waste, paint cans, mercury film packs, fly ash, still bottoms and hydroxide sludge.

So far little action has been taken to remove any of these materials, which were most recently chronicled in a 2,142-page report published last June by GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. It was prepared for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

Where remediation stands according to DEM spokesperson: “The Remedial Action phase of the project has not commenced yet. This phase would commence following Department concurrence with the findings of the Site Investigation Report, which also includes the State/PRP Group addressing the outstanding Department technical comments as well as performing public notice/comment period requirements of the Site Remediation Regulations.”

Hopkins Hill Sand & Stone. The West Greenwich quarry, a Cardi Corp. subsidiary, had been operating without a Rhode Island pollutant discharge elimination system (RIPDES) permit for 16 years before DEM decided to apply a bit of bureaucratic muscle last year.

The mining operation, which conducts blasting, abuts the Big River Management Area, an 8,319-acre conservation area. Quarry waste runoff from the property has left plenty of environmental scars: stormwater damage, accumulating silt in stream beds, and out-of-place gravel and rocks deposited in the conservation area.

In late February of last year, DEM issued a notice of violation (NOV) to Hopkins Hill Sand & Stone LLC and the property’s owner, Hopkins Hill Road Realty LLC.

The NOV charged both parties with violations of Rhode Island’s Water Pollution Control Act and state water-quality and pollutant-discharge elimination system regulations. The enforcement included a \$67,896 penalty and required the parties to immediately cease the discharge of all processed water and stormwater to nearby wetlands until a permit is issued.

Hopkins Hill Sand & Stone appealed. The quarry is still operating illegally and polluting a nearby conservation area.

Where remediation stands according to DEM spokesperson: “An appeal was filed on the NOV, so the ordered actions in the NOV and the penalty assessed in the NOV are legally stayed until the appeal is

concluded. We are in settlement negotiations with the respondents to resolve the NOV. No permit has been issued and the discharges have not ceased.”

Rhode Island Recycled Metals (RIRM). The waterfront scrap yard on Allens Avenue in Providence has been flaunting its contempt for the state’s environmental regulations since it began operating illegally 12 years ago.

It took DEM six years to respond with legal action. Since the original complaint was filed by DEM on March 4, 2015, more than 70 hearings, reports and conferences have been held in Rhode Island Superior Court.

The scrap-metal processing facility sits atop a former Superfund site that was contaminated during the 1980s by a computer and electronics shredding company. The property has tested positive for PCBs.

The facility also has several vessels slated for demolition sitting offshore. The vessels, including a fully submerged former Soviet nuclear submarine and a partially submerged ferry, are in violation of environmental regulations, including spilling oil into the Providence River.

The Coastal Resources Management Council insisted that the submarine be fully demolished by 2012. RIRM ignored that order. The business also brought in a handful of other vessels for scrap without authorization.

Where remediation stands according to DEM spokesperson: “RIRM is operating under various orders issued by the Superior Court. RIRM continues to work on the removal of the submarine. There is no schedule that has been set by the court to complete the work. Once the submarine is removed, RIRM intends to remove the two remaining sunken vessels (the tug and the ferry). The barge was removed (not relocated). Minimum stormwater controls are installed (haybales and silt fence). The \$25,000 penalty was paid.”

Boston to NYC in 100 Minutes

With train-loving President Joe Biden in the White House, the North Atlantic Rail (NAR) initiative hopes to make high-speed rail a reality.

The initiative proposes connecting small and mid-sized urban centers throughout New England with a high-speed trunk line, which would operate at 200 mph.

The NAR initiative also includes building a 16-mile rail tunnel under Long Island Sound, connecting New York City to Boston, with stops in Connecticut and Providence, in a 100-minute ride. In Rhode Island, components would include frequent high-speed rails from Kingston, T.F. Green International Airport, and Providence to Boston.

NAR steering committee members have estimated that the project would cost a total of \$105 billion to design and build the top priority projects and trunk line. And now that Biden is pushing a \$2 trillion sustainable infrastructure and clean energy plan, NAR sees a high-speed rail system as a serious likelihood.

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