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Possible landfill fire at Rumpke

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State and county officials are working with Rumpke Inc. to address a possible underground fire at the company's landfill on Hughes Road in Colerain Township.

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The firm notified the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency Aug. 31 that subsurface wells in the northeast area of the landfill had elevated temperatures and carbon monoxide levels.

Rumpke spokeswoman Amanda Pratt says no smoke or steam is visible and the surface of the landfill cell appears to be unchanged.

On Sept. 2, Rumpke and Montauk Energy, the firm that recovers and sells methane gas extracted from the landfill, notified the Colerain Township fire department and administration that gas extraction wells on the facility's north side were testing hot - one as high as 194 degrees Fahrenheit.

The company's permit requires it to report if methane extraction wells exceed 149 degrees.

A release from the OEPA said regulators believe a subsurface fire is present and there is no evidence to suggest the situation is causing any health concern.

Larry Riddle, district manager and landfill manager at the Hughes Road facility, said the firm is working with the OEPA, Hamilton County Environmental Services and the Hamilton County General Health District to monitor the situation.

"We are currently waiting (as of Friday, Sept. 4) for the latest sampling and will look at how it's trending," he said. "We are not sure the higher reading was no just an anomaly. The trend we are seeing now indicates it's a stable situation."

Riddle said a backyard compost can show internal temperatures between 145 and 160 degrees as decomposition goes on.

"We are a really big compost pile," he said. "There is a lot of chemistry that goes on in there."

He said the landfill cell is being monitored closely for uneven settlement and obvious signs of differential settling that would indicate problems underground.

"This isn't common but it's not abnormal," he said. "It's not a reason to panic."

Riddle said the two affected wells and those in close proximity to them were shut off and will continue to be monitored at least twice daily.

Hamilton County Public Health, Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services and Ohio EPA are working with the company.

Pratt said to her knowledge this has not happened at the landfill before.

Montauk Energy had been testing a new way to try to produce more methane when temperatures started climbing past the desired level, Pratt said. Montauk handles production of renewable energy used by as many as 25,000 local residences and businesses.

Pratt said she is unsure if Montauk will continue trying the new method, which entails removing water to encourage deep landfill decomposition.

"At this point we are focusing on alleviating this issue," Pratt said.
