

April 20, 2007

Recent Discoveries and Extreme Safety Precautions

In an age of extreme sports, extreme thirst and extreme measures, I guess my life is so tame by comparison. That may be but I do recognize the need for extra precautions as absolutely necessary when I see them. The day-to-day work being done to accomplish the capping and closure of the Hemlock Landfill requires caution on any given day. The contractor's huge excavators dig and spin and unload at an impressive speed. The bulldozers quickly distribute the dumped material, sometimes up to precariously steep slopes, in an attempt to keep as small a footprint as possible for the time being. So far, this has been interesting to watch. Sometimes there are surprises.

Last Friday, there was the surprise of finding buried trash beyond the limits of where we expected it. It was found in an area that would become the retention basin. After the closure is complete, the runoff of rain will be diverted to drainage ditches along the perimeter of the sloped, capped landfill, arriving in the newly formed basin.

I was informed of the discovery as soon as it was made and I quickly walked over to observe and take some pictures. In addition to observing the grey coloration in the sand formed by methane gas above the trash and the return to our local yellowish color of sand below the trash, I could not help but be impressed with the speed with which these machines work. While trash was being unloaded into dump trucks and hauled up to the landfill, screening of compost was taking place at the same time. The screened material is being moved aside as valuable topsoil for the final loam and seed cover of the closed landfill.

The contractors assumed I would arrive from the direction of the highway barn and they hoped I had boots on. (I always have boots handy.) I am glad I did not arrive from that direction. I would have needed more than boots. What would suffice? Orange vest, flags, hard-hat and interoperable radios? I had no desire to walk across that work site if I did not have to. Instead, I walked through the woods and observed the operation from a high spot. I had a fine view and took some pictures.

The speed and intensity of the activity I have observed so far are to be expected at many construction sites. They are to be taken seriously as potentially dangerous sites. It will soon accelerate to a different level, though. Beginning somewhere during the last week of April to the first week in May, (Yes, can you believe it? It is right around the corner!) the actual rubber membrane liner will be placed over the old landfill. At that time, everyone involved will be extremely aware of potential dangers and you need to be, also.

As the membrane is placed, contractors will be on the lookout for any indication that rising methane gases are causing the membrane to bubble and rise. We don't think of that now but a little gas here or there, rising through the soils, can go unnoticed. Cover that rising gas with an impenetrable membrane and it is temporarily trapped and concentrated. This is not a good time for a cigarette to relieve one's tension or to pass the time.

The contractor's will be so concentrated on the task at hand and the area will be busier than usual as they rush to deal with the placement of the membrane over such a large area, that this will not be a safe area for any unauthorized personnel. It will

transform from interesting to intensity and it is critical that some safety rules be followed. Even Town employees, who may have business near or at the highway barn must follow the following rules:

- The public must stay out of the area. No excuses. Please remember that the composting operation does not exist at this time. Do not drop off leaves and do not attempt to drive (or walk) in to peruse such items as rocks for landscaping.
- There is to be no smoking by anyone in the area. Methane gas is explosive. Cigarettes can also destroy the liner. The smoking ban applies to Town employees as well as anyone else and it includes any and all Town buildings, such as the highway barn and rooms attached to it for other departments. The smoking ban includes all types of smoking including but not limited to pipes, cigars and cigarettes.
- Authorized personnel, such as Board of Health, Highway and Water Departments, in addition to the contractors, must drive slowly and with extreme caution, as the area will be buzzing with contractor's activity.

We were "lucky", I guess with the unexpected trash. It can be hauled right over to the known landfill, dumped, covered and capped. Fortunately, extra engineering is not needed to respond to this discovery.

I can only hope that a potentially dangerous situation will never materialize in connection with this project and we can continue feeling just such as fortunate.