

Roxbury landfill protestors decry 'Fenimorons' in Trenton



Elliott Ruga of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, wearing a gas mask, participates in the protest rally in Trenton.
(Photo: William Westhoven/Staff Photo)

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TRENTON – Resident and environmental groups opposed to the capping of Fenimore Landfill in Roxbury went on the offensive Tuesday, staging a protest rally outside the headquarters of the state Department of Environmental Protection and under a billboard they erected directly across the street from DEP headquarters.

"Ever since the Fenimorons at

DEP took control of the Fenimore Landfill, things have been getting worse," said Jeff Tittel, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club. "Now with this current capping, we believe this plan will not work because landfills are not stable and caps will always fail at some point. Capping the site is the easiest and cheapest way to deal with the site, not the type of closure that will actually work."

The groups have been urging the excavation of materials dumped at Fenimore that are producing toxic and foul-smelling hydrogen sulfide gas.

DEP announced in March that it would cap instead of excavate, saying the capping plan was more viable, less expensive and, according to them, an effective permanent solution. Gov. Chris Christie has backed the capping plan on several occasions, warning Roxbury residents that "trucking out" the materials would cause more gas to be released and possibly affect surrounding towns as well.

"Believe me, you don't want this stuff trucked out. Because digging up that landfill and trucking out will take years. And the disturbance of those materials will create more smell and a bigger problem," Christie told a REACT member at a Long Hill town hall meeting in February. "It needs to be capped and it's going to be capped."

While about two dozen protestors — some wearing gas masks, all holding up signs — caused a stir Tuesday under the State Street billboard, two other members of REACT protested at a DEP "Tourism Tuesday" event attended by Commissioner Bob Martin and Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno at Spruce Run Recreation Area in Clinton.

In Trenton, about two dozen people attended the protest, which drew curious glances from passers-by, some of whom stopped and spoke with the group, while others clapped in support and took photos.

Trenton resident Angel Torres joined the group's chant of "Truck it Out," improvising his own chant as he stared at the billboard.

"Do something!" he yelled at the DEP building.

"We are here helping our member organization REACT," said Highlands Coalition Executive Director Julia Somers. "They really have been pushed to the edge by DEP ... I think this is a moral issue. Never mind the environmental issue. It is truly outrageous that DEP is doing everything they can in the courts, spending all kinds of money, trying to deny the people of Roxbury the knowledge of what is in the dump."

DEP has denied requests for soil samples from both the township and the landfill owners, and successfully challenged demands for those samples in both state and federal court.

"If you don't have the information, you have to assume what's there is bad," Somers said. "And that's why DEP doesn't want anyone to know, because it was brought in on their watch."

"This billboard sends a clear message to DEP that you can't ignore the festering pollution and the festering dump in Roxbury any longer," said Doug O'Malley, director with Environment New Jersey. "This is not about rhetoric. This is about people in Roxbury getting sick and DEP failing to act."

The protestors included several young Roxbury residents, including Josh Decker, who will be a junior this fall at Roxbury High School. Decker said he also attended a REACT rally here last fall.

"My mother encouraged me to come," he admitted. "And the smell isn't really that great, so we want to get rid of that."

"People are worried about what's in the air that we can't smell," said his mother, Judy Decker. "There's sulfur dioxide in the air now. ... There's a lot of sick people at the bottom of the hill (in Ledgewood)."

The state last week awarded a \$9.6 million contract to Conti Enterprises of South Plainfield for the controversial capping of Fenimore Landfill. The project is scheduled to begin next month and expected to be completed before the end of the year.