

The Watchdog Bulletin



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A VISION FOR OUR CITY: NO INDUSTRIAL LANDFILLS

The landfill which the Catalyst Paper mill operates in the neighbourhood of Wildwood (Powell River) began as an illegal dumping operation sometime in the early 1970's. The industrial waste dumped into the landfill included solid wastes that could not be discharged through the effluent (liquid) system. At some point, the mill obtained a permit from the provincial government for the landfill.

In spite of this dumping, the substantial amount of fly ash produced by the Catalyst mill had not been officially dumped at the Wildwood landfill until last year (2006). (The waste burned in the mill's power boiler (No. 19) determines the amount of fly ash waste.) Previously, the mill sent this unusable waste product to an industrial landfill site in Washington state. However, last year, Catalyst decided that they were no longer willing to barge the fly ash off site as they could realize a substantial cost savings by dumping this exceptionally high alkaline fly ash in the Wildwood landfill adjacent to its mill rather than paying to ship it a thousand miles away.

However, in order to effect this new dumping, Catalyst had to seek a major amendment to their current landfill permit.

The original 1970s landfill was capped with pavement sometime during the 1990's resulting in what looks like a parking lot. This capping was done in an attempt to prevent water from entering the material in the landfill and moving it into the groundwater and Powell Lake.

At the same time, a 'mini-landfill' was permitted adjacent to the now-capped 'parking lot' landfill. The mini-landfill had a lifespan of 100,000 cubic meters total and is close to capacity as a result of Catalyst's decision last year to dump the fly ash there.

Currently, the fly ash slurry is trucked from the mill via the public highway to the Wildwood landfill. Then, the fly ash concoction is dumped from a cement truck and allowed to rundown into the containment area (see photo above). The unsightly landfill is now close to grade levels and prone to effects of the wind. The prevalent winds, which are 'southeasterly', pass over the landfill and then travel a very short distance to the Wildwood residential community and an elementary school.

Today, Catalyst is in the process of obtaining a major amendment to

Important Stories in Our Community

- *The Catalyst Landfill must go*
- *What's up with the COW?*
- *Check out Landfill Basics at www.ejnet.org/landfills/*

Photo at left: Fly ash slurry dumped at the Catalyst Landfill in Wildwood

their original provincial government permit. The mill wants to double the annual amount of fly ash dumped in the Wildwood landfill. Currently, the mill generates up to 13,500 cubic meters of fly ash annually. Catalyst is asking to be allowed to increase their fly ash dumping to 25,000 cubic meters annually.

The permit amendment would allow 'above grade' storage of the dumped fly ash up to a point near the top of the Wildwood bluffs -- a mountain of fly ash! The proposed expanded landfill location is inappropriate especially in an era where it is well understood that environmental contaminants should be dealt with cautiously.

Noting the significant downsizing at Catalyst, the question of why Catalyst plans to increase, by almost 100%, the amount of fly ash waste it produces remains unanswered. Regardless, any expansion of the Catalyst landfill should not be allowed on the present site. In fact, the entire landfill should be moved far away from people, their watersheds, and their land. Our community vision requires sustainability and environmental protection. Corporate 'least costly alternatives' mean long-term damage to our region and our health. They are not in the best interests of the area's people or its ecosystem.

Problems with the Wildwood Landfill

- located in a residential area;
- affects the health and welfare of citizens (truck traffic, noise, dust, contaminants);
- Waste components currently allowed to be dumped include fly ash, waste asbestos, and miscellaneous mill wastes*;
- potential escapement of toxic particulate into the air and groundwater;
- contaminated water build-up (leachate) – according to experts, all leachate collection systems leak over time;
- located above an hydroelectric dam which could be at significant risk if the landfill were to migrate (i.e., earthquake).

*Miscellaneous mill wastes include dirt-contaminated wood chips, road sweeping, asphalt and concrete rubble, elemental sulphur, spent activated carbon, lime and lime dregs, effluent treatment solids, and boiler feedwater resins.

THE BC LANDFILL PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESS

The provincial Ministry of the Environment (MOE), under the Campbell government, has changed the way citizens concerns are dealt with in regard to landfill waste permits. Formerly, a citizen could address their concerns directly to the MOE.

Today, however, concerns must be addressed in a letter to the applicant seeking the permit – in this case, the Catalyst mill – and the applicant then responds to the concerns – not the provincial government. The original letter of concerns and Catalyst's response, become part of the Consultation Report which make up a portion of the permit application.

This flawed process allows applicants a 'leg up' as they can 'address' citizen concerns without the adequacy of their answers being vetted by a neutral body. Once a permit or permit amendment is granted, then a legal appeal can be taken. However, winning such an appeal becomes more difficult under this new regulatory scheme. In spite of this unfairness, we urge our readers to write a letter outlining concerns regarding the Catalyst permit amendment application to:

Dr. Sarah Barkowski
Mgr, Environment and Quality Systems
Catalyst Paper Company
6270 Yew Street
Powell River, B.C. V8A 4K1



City Hall Blues by Lupo:

COW* Update
February 6, 2007

Greetings from the 'green pastures' of city hall where your CoW correspondent couldn't help but notice the re-scheduled 9:00 a.m. meeting – that happened at 2:00 p.m.-- was attended by less than half the staff than usual. A remarkably slick way to try to stop the bleeding of red ink when the 2007 budget is looking so grim.

A very snippy discussion ensued about PR Regional District members' email comments **regarding whatever happened to the \$500,000 the city received from the Regional District in return for the city accepting their septic waste for a 20-year period.** The Regional District internal emails had somehow been obtained by City Chief Financial Officer, Dave Douglas, and the city took offence at their substance. Apparently, the total sum of \$500,000 was to have been used to repair and modify the Wildwood Septic Lagoon. The lagoon has been the long-standing repository for septic waste from the regional district.

Regional District Board members learned that nothing had been done at the Wildwood Lagoon and they were trying to sort things out via internal email. The emails obtained by Mr. Douglas caused the CoW to 'wig out' and call for an apology from the Regional Board for having the audacity to look at the city's budget documents – documents that showed that the \$500,000 was there in 2005 but was no longer accounted for as a line item in 2006. Councillor Tremblay explained that although the \$500,000 had not been spent by the city on work at the lagoon in 2006, it had been "widely invested" by the city! (One can't help but wonder if the investment interest shouldn't be going to the Regional District?) As a result of the 'widely invested' lagoon money, there is now more tension between city hall and the regional district than the current plate tectonics that are making geologists nervous about the future.

On a different front, Catalyst Paper Co. has put the city on notice of its intent to significantly develop the Wildwood landfill to accept more 'ash waste'. The City Planner was lost when trying to explain the Catalyst plan to the CoW. To be fair, it was an impossible task. Trying to argue that a new waste storage scheme at the Wildwood landfill that piled waste with a pH11 (which would peel the skin off you) to a height of about "one metre below the top of the Wildwood bluffs" would not result in a lot of unplanned, fugitive dust release was a mind-bending exercise, to say the least.

*COW – Committee of the Whole of the City Council