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Hillside's smelly landfill to be capped by end of '08

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The reeking landfill that has plagued Hillside residents and stunk up cars zipping by on the Eisenhower Expressway will close next spring and be capped to prevent further odor leakage by the end of 2008, the company that manages the site announced Thursday.

The landfill had been controversial even before the former stone quarry was converted to a dump in 1981.

The stench, which longtime Hillside Village President Joe Tamburino has called "the biggest public nuisance in the state of Illinois," has been problematic for decades, but it became unbearable in the fall of 2005 when a piping system that collected methane gas broke down.

The company doing the methane recovery, Resource Technology Corp., had been involved in a long-running bankruptcy case and had not maintained the system, according to the village.

Methane is not toxic, but it smells rotten -- more so in some kinds of weather -- and can cause nausea and headaches.

Tamburino was jubilant Thursday. "We've been waiting 30 years for this," he said. "Given that we never wanted the landfill to begin with, that we've never been able to get a schedule on closing it, I'm really very, very happy because for once I can stand up in front of the people of Hillside and say, 'Here's what's happening, here's the closing date.'

Allied Waste, which recently assumed control of day-to-day management of the operation from John Sexton Sand & Gravel Corp., assessed the 55-acre landfill and decided to close it.

To do so, filling the facility will be accelerated from 400 tons of municipal waste a day to about 4,000 tons a day. Because the smelly gases emanate from years-old waste at the base of the pile, the additional fresh refuse will not worsen the odor, said Brian Holcomb, Allied Waste's general manager.

"Allied agrees that the conditions at the landfill are unacceptable and the landfill needs to be properly closed on the schedule that we have outlined," he said. "There will be improvement this summer and total elimination [of the odors] by the end of next year."

The site, at 4100 Frontage Rd. just north of the Eisenhower, will receive no more solid waste after June 15, 2008, and the landfill will be covered by six months later, according to the agreement with the Village of Hillside and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, among other parties.

The company also will install a new gas collection and monitoring system, and landscape the site with trees, plants and board fencing. At that point, the land will remain as open space, Holcomb said.

The decision to close down the site comes after state EPA violations and a lawsuit from Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan's office, which led to a court ordering site owner Congress Development Corp. (in which Allied Waste and Sexton are partners) to develop a new methane recovery system. As of last summer, Congress Development had spent \$3 million installing new wells to pump out the gas and other short-term fixes such as lime sprays and laying down tarps to collect and extract the methane. But the stench lingers to this day.

The announcement was welcomed by Toni Noti, who has lived three homes down from the landfill since 1963.

"I think it is wonderful that it's closing down," she said. "I wish it was sooner. The smell is so bad that it wakes me up at night. It also gives me bad headaches."