



## I-Team: School of Mines to bury radioactive waste in city landfill

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GOLDEN - The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has given permission to the Colorado School of Mines to dispose of radioactive waste in a municipal landfill near Golden, instead of sending it to a protected or licensed landfill in Idaho designed to handle hazardous waste.

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The I-Team has learned that the decision goes against a recommendation by the state's own hazardous material division experts.

The 457 bags of contaminated soil were leftover from 75 years of mining experiments, some of which included radioactive ores, at the School of Mines Research Institute Creekside site.

"Our health department is clearly not protecting our interests, they're protecting the polluters," said environmental activist Adrienne Anderson. "Given this decision, anybody that lives next to a regular trash landfill now has to fear whether the state health department is going to allow nuclear waste from other sites to be put in their local dump."

The 9News I-Team obtained an internal memo from the hazardous material division sent to health department director, Doug Benevento. It was written one month before Benevento decided the contaminated soils can be buried in the BFI Foothills Landfill that has a mailing address in Golden, but resides in unincorporated Jefferson County. That landfill is permitted and licensed to take non-hazardous waste material, according to District Manager Mike Magee.

Among other things, the division expressed concern that the city landfill sits over groundwater which is eventually used for drinking supplies in the metro area.

The memo said disposal of licensed material of this kind in a municipal landfill sets a precedent that neither we, nor the communities of Colorado, would wish to set.

Instead, the division recommended the contaminated waste be buried in an industrial landfill in the town of Bennett that has extra protections minimizing future leaks. The division leaders wrote, "It's the right thing to do".

However, the state dismissed the advice of its division and, on August 26, wrote a letter to the School of Mines allowing the waste to be buried in the Foothills landfill.

"We don't think it can pose a danger," said Environmental Programs Director Howard Roitman. "We are not bending any rules." Roitman said the state made its decision to allow the radioactive waste in the city landfill after it reviewed a new study by the School of Mines and S.M. Stoller Corp. which showed radiation levels lower than previous test results.

"We are making a technical regulatory conclusion based on the data that this is a safe place for it to go," said Roitman. In the approval letter to the school, the state wrote that putting the contaminated soils in the BFI Foothills landfill would not create a significant risk to workers, the general public or the environment.

The School of Mines will save hundreds of thousands of dollars by disposing the waste locally instead of sending it to a licensed or protected landfill, according to the health department.

"It's about money," said Anderson. "It's about power, it's about inappropriate influence of state polluters on our state government."

But the school said it is sending the waste to the most appropriate place at a reasonable cost.

"The school has an obligation to protect the public, the environment and clean the site up," said Linn Havelick, Director of Environmental Health and Safety for the Colorado School of Mines. "We also have an obligation to taxpayers to not spend their money needlessly."

Earlier test results of the Creekside site by the company New Horizons show levels of Radium 226 that exceed federal and state standards at least 10 times. Based on those test results, the health department repeatedly warned the school that it may not put its most contaminated soils in the city landfill because it would pose an unacceptable risk and possibly leak into groundwater.

Even though the state never has allowed radioactive waste in a city landfill before this, Health Department Director Doug Benevento won't comment about the change in policy.

While the School of Mines said it's preparing to bury the radioactive soil in the BFI Foothills landfill within the next couple of weeks, the landfill has not officially been awarded the job. "We have been approved to take the material, but the job has not been awarded yet," said District Manager Mike Magee. This would be the first contaminated material from the CSMRI site in the landfill, according to Magee. Should the company accept the material, Magee said they have a leachate collection system and groundwater monitoring in place that would detect and prevent problems.

Meanwhile, the city of Golden disagrees with the state experts who are concerned about leaks into the groundwater. City spokesperson Sabrina Henderson posted a news release on the website that tells residents drinking water in Golden will not be

impacted by this decision. "Golden's water is surface water (run off) that runs into Clear Creek, where it is taken into our water treatment system about a mile upstream from town; it is not pumped out of the ground," Henderson wrote.

The Golden City Council is expected to talk about the issue in a meeting Thursday night at 7:00, according to City Manager Michael Bestor.