

Submitter: Susan Watkins
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB726
February 24, 2025

To: The Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
From: Susan Watkins
13440 SW McCabe Chapel Road
McMinnville, Oregon 97128
Re: SB 726

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Smith, and Members of the Committee:

I urge you to vote FOR SB 726. This measure is long overdue.

SB 726 will require landfills to monitor for methane emissions with "advanced methane detection technology" and to seal off any leaks they find. The landfill will be required to report both the emissions and the results of their repairs to the state Environmental Quality Commission and hence to the public.

What currently happens is very different, as we here in Yamhill County experienced five years ago at Riverbend Landfill outside McMinnville. The landfill was required by state and federal law to monitor a portion of the surface of the landfill via a technique called "surface emission monitoring" -- i.e., people walking on the landfill surface cover carrying monitors and looking for cracks or seeps. If they found a leak exceeding 500 ppm, they were to report and fix the leak.

Riverbend filed surface emission monitoring quarterly reports from March 23, 2015, through November 19, 2018. None of those reports indicated that any areas of distressed vegetation, cracks, or seeps in the cover were identified by the Landfill's monitoring, nor did the reports reflect that any methane exceedances over 500 ppm were measured.

However, on May 25, 2018, during this period, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) performed an on-site inspection at Riverbend. As part of that inspection, EPA personnel performed flame ionization detector measurements (i.e., "advanced methane detection technology") in a search for methane in areas where they observed cracks or seeps in the cover. Using this technology, the EPA detected two exceedances >500 ppm in the cover and seven exceedances of >500ppm at penetrations in the cover.

On January 27, 2020, the EPA issued a Notice of Violation to Riverbend and assessed a penalty of \$104,482 for the landfill's failure to find and report the leaks.

Riverbend's defense to the EPA's citation wasn't that the excessive leaks had not occurred, but that the law didn't require them to use the new technology. They knew the law prohibited them from allowing methane leaks exceeding 500 ppm, but their focus wasn't on containing leaks. The leaks didn't matter to the Landfill, so long as they could say they had followed the letter of the law. If the outdated methodology didn't identify a leak, it was as if the leak didn't exist. SB 726 would close that loophole.

I hardly need mention that methane is a powerful greenhouse gas and landfills a primary source of methane emissions.

SB 726 will greatly help reduce landfill emissions. Please advance this bill.