



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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City Budgets \$141 Million for Toxic Waste Cleanup at Staten Island Site

ANDREW J LANZA June 19, 2009

New York, NY -- The city budget, expected to be approved this week, dedicates \$141 million for the cleanup of a long-abandoned toxic waste dump in Staten Island. Community representatives will meet with the Department of Environmental Protection Monday to finalize the cleanup plan.

The funds have been set aside for work at the Brookfield Avenue landfill, one of five city landfills involved in an illegal dumping scandal that sent a city Department of Sanitation official and a hauling operator to prison in the 1980s. Of the five landfills, the Staten Island site is the last to be remediated.

Residents of the Great Kills section of the borough, which borders the 272-acre landfill, were heartened by the news and hoped cleanup work, delayed almost 30 years, would begin promptly.

"We've watched as landfills in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens have been cleaned up," said Geri Kelsch, president of the Northern Great Kills Civic Association. "At long last, it looks like it's our turn."

The funding announcement comes after Kelsch's civic association [sued](#) the city over the cleanup delay. Represented by the public interest law firm Earthjustice, residents frustrated by the lack of progress hoped a court could force the cleanup of the site.

"Those convicted of dumping this toxic waste have long ago served their time," said Earthjustice attorney Keri Powell. "But not until these residents have reclaimed their community from contamination can the city finally close this unpleasant chapter in its history."

The city's \$141 million will be supplemented by \$100 million from the state to cover the full cost of cleanup. A cleanup plan has been developed and approved by the city and state.

"We have a cleanup plan. We have the funding," said John Felicetti, co-chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Brookfield Remediation. "Now what we'd like to see is trucks rolling in and cleaning up this mess once and for all."

Staten Island Borough President James P. Molinaro, who has long called for the landfill's cleanup, welcomed the funding announcement and pledged to help secure the city's cooperation so work can begin.

"While I am heartened by this piece of news, I and the community know all too well that until that first shovel strikes into that contaminated site, all of us -- electeds and residents together -- must remain involved and committed to see this project started and completed as designed in the 2007 specifications," said Borough President James Molinaro.

Councilman Vincent M. Ignizio was instrumental in securing the city funding. U.S. Representative Michael McMahon, State Senator Andrew Lanza, Assemblyman Michael Cusick, Assemblyman Louis R. Tobacco have also pressed for action at the Brookfield site.

Between 1974 and 1980, tens of thousands of gallons of toxic industrial waste were dumped at the Brookfield landfill, which was designed only for municipal solid waste. At the time the scandal was uncovered, it was compared to the infamous incident at Love Canal, which gave rise to the nation's environmental health movement.

Though smaller than the borough's infamous Fresh Kills landfill, the Brookfield site poses nearly as great a threat to the environment as its 3,000-acre counterpart due to the toxic combination of cyanide, lead, arsenic, and other contaminants leaking from the landfill.

A federal investigation found that up to 50,000 gallons a day of hazardous waste were dumped at the landfill during its last six years of operation. The toxic mix of oil, sludge, metal plating, lacquers and solvents remain buried on the site. Water flowing through the site picks up toxic chemicals, resulting in a daily discharge of approximately 95,000 gallons of contaminated wastewater into the surrounding community.

Nearly 10,000 people live within a quarter-mile of the landfill. In addition, four schools and one church -- the Tanglewood Nursery School, P.S. 37, P.S. 32, St. Patrick's School, and St. Patrick's church -- are within a quarter mile of the landfill.