

https://www.southernminn.com/faribault_daily_news/news/landfill-fire-nearly-out-fire-chief-lithium-ion-batteries-likely-culprit/article_be28a408-017b-11ee-a759-6794443ce9b7.html

SPOTLIGHT

UPDATE

Landfill fire nearly out; fire chief: lithium-ion batteries 'likely culprit'

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The Rice County Solid Waste Facility landfill is still slightly smoldering, but the fire suppression work is nearly complete, according to Faribault Fire Chief Dustin Dienst.

The landfill reopened to the general public on Tuesday, after about a week of being closed after a fire broke out.

Improper disposal of a cellphone, laptop and other wireless electronic may be the source of the fire.



The Rice County Solid Waste Facility burns on Thursday, May 25. The fire would continue for at least another week. (Photo courtesy of Rice County)

"We will never know for sure what caused this fire, but improperly disposed lithium-ion batteries are a likely culprit," Dienst said. "Staff see phones, computers, tools, etc. on a daily basis in with the household trash. ... I can confidently say that we need to stress to the general public the importance of properly disposing of batteries and other items that require special attention."

Before the fire started on May 22, an air quality alert had been issued by the National Weather Service, due to Canadian wildfire smoke that was passing through Minnesota.

Along with the heat, humidity and other weather conditions, the Weather Service advised those with pre-existing conditions to limit outdoor exposure. They also advised everyone to limit activities that cause pollution.

That's when the landfill caught on fire.

The following Sunday and Monday the National Weather Service issued a second warning, due to the ground-level ozone reaching orange, or unhealthy for at-risk groups.

Rice County officials were loaned equipment to monitor the air quality from residences within a mile of the landfill. Officials reported "no readings of concern," and sent air samples to be analyzed in a lab, according to a county press release issued Thursday evening.

After speaking with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the State Fire Marshall, local fire departments were directed to smother the remaining fire with dirt.

"There is some very minor smoldering going on as of (Thursday) morning," Dienst said. "Crews are working on covering the entire area that was on fire, but the slope is causing a bit of a challenge. ... We will be having an after-action meeting with all stakeholders involved in this incident and talk about mitigation strategies."

The fire, and concerns from some nearby residents about air quality, attracted media attention from around the state.

A webpage was set up for updates about the landfill fire (www.RiceCountyMN.gov/694/Landfill-Fire-Updates). A timeline, as well as numerous press releases, can be found on the page.

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