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**FORUM NEWS SERVICE**

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**attended a county commission meeting**  
**in April**  
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Alexander landfill operator found with radioactive waste

LAUREN DONOVAN Bismarck Tribune

Lauren Donovan

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Residents of McKenzie County attended a county commission meeting in April to oppose the disposal of radioactive oilfield waste.

An oil field waste landfill that withdrew its application to handle radioactive waste is under review for having tons of illegal radioactive material in its site north of Alexander.

The State Health Department ordered IHD Solids Management to remove nearly 950 tons of material and undergo a third-party inspection of the landfill after radioactive waste was detected in separate inspections in May and June.

Two other oil field waste companies also were found to have illegal materials on site, though in much smaller quantities. Both of those – Secure Energy Services and Gibson Energy WISCO – are applying for expanded permits under North Dakota’s new rules that allow up to 50 picocuries of radioactive oil field waste in specially permitted landfills.

The situation came to light when the department’s waste management division tested all 12 oil waste landfills. Assistant Director Steve Tillotson said the department recently purchased radiation monitoring equipment so it can monitor radioactive waste landfills.

The department did the survey to see how oil waste landfills are complying under the permits they have now, which prohibit anything greater than 5 picocuries, according to Tillotson.

The survey found waste measuring between 5 and 80 picocuries.

“IHD seems to have a problem. We caught them in two inspections with different materials. They’re supposed to know what they’re getting, and I’m surprised about this,” Tillotson said. “Somebody slipped it to ’em. I don’t think they took this knowingly.”

Gibson Energy, at its WISCO landfill near Williston, agreed to remove 18 yards of illegal waste and ship it to Oaks Disposal, a certified radioactive landfill near Glendive, Mont., owned by Buckhorn Energy.

At its 13-Mile Landfill Williston operation, Secure Energy removed 10 loads of material. General Manager Kurt Rhea said illegal waste in the 30- to 40-picocurie range came from its waste treatment plant. He said an operator there directed an employee to load the material on the side of a transport truck that doesn’t get scanned when it goes through the landfill. Rhea said the company and the employee reported the situation.

“(Health officials) were all over it. They were at our facility within 24 hours,” he said.

All three operators have changed practices to prevent similar occurrences. IHD did not return phone calls for this story, but told the department it is now running a handheld Geiger counter over all loads entering the facility. Secure Energy changed its protocol so the whole transport truck is scanned, and Gibson told the department it will scan the first load of each project and a set sequence thereafter.

IHD will not be fined for violating its permit conditions, according to Tillotson.

“I talked to the higher-ups and it was decided not to, if it takes care of the problem and it doesn’t occur again. Hauling 950 tons of material out of state is something they’re not going to want to do again,” he said.

About 2 million tons of material was handled by oil waste landfills in 2015.

Gary Ebel, of Buckhorn Energy, said he applauds the department for cracking down on landfill operators, but said the findings do raise questions.

“How much has been buried and how long has this been going on? They’re required to know the regulations,” said Ebel, who suggested violators should have to test “clean” for a couple of years before North Dakota issues them a permit to handle radioactive waste under the new rules.

All oil field waste landfill operators will soon be required to monitor every load that comes in for disposal, according to Tillotson, who said the days of landfill operators depending on the waste generator to certify that incoming loads meet the rules will soon be over.

“Our rules say we can modify their permits for cause,” he said.

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Steve Tillotson, assistant director, State Health Department

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