

# Recycling center implements odor-suppression system

By Sean Quinn on June 9, 2017 · 1 Comment

WEST ORANGE, NJ — The vendor that rents the West Orange Recycling Center has implemented an odor-suppression system in an effort to prevent the foul smell of mulch from spreading to the nearby residential neighborhood.

Reliable Wood Products installed the system in April at the request of the township, which has received complaints about the smell emanating from the site for years. Its purpose is to spray an odor neutralizer into the air whenever necessary to terminate aroma particles before they leave the center and spread to houses in the area. It is not meant to eliminate the smell completely since it cannot be avoided at the site itself.



Photo Courtesy of Leigh-Ann Zaolino  
The West Orange Environmental Center, above, recently implemented an odor-suppression system, with officials and some residents disagreeing over its efficacy.

And while Wayne DeFeo, the environmental consultant who inspects the recycling center on behalf of the township, acknowledged that no odor suppression system is perfect, he said he has not found any problems with this particular one.

“Overall, so far as I can tell, it seems to do its job,” DeFeo told the West Orange Chronicle in a June 1 phone interview. “When I’ve been there and it’s been in operation, it seems to have worked.”

Reliable Wood Products did not respond to requests for comment before press time June 6.

According to DeFeo, the odor suppression system is a fairly simple technology consisting of a large, movable tank with two nozzles attached. The tank contains water mixed with a plant-based, nontoxic odor neutralizing compound. Whenever there is waste material onsite and the wind is blowing in the direction of the neighborhood — the center utilizes a windsock to tell — the system is moved downwind and sprays the odor neutralizer. Essentially, he said, the concept is similar to spraying Febreze in one’s home.

DeFeo pointed out that the West Orange Recycling Center is still perfecting its usage of the system. But his inspection reports, filed after the system was put into place, show that no odor was detected offsite and only a slight odor was noticed in certain areas at the center. His 2017 reports before the system was installed showed the same results or noted no odor at all.

An April 21 inspection completed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection — the NJDEP’s only examination of the center in 2017 thus far — also found no odor-related violations. A search of the department’s inspections database showed only one odor-related violation in the past five years. That violation came as part of an inspection on April 2, 2016.

But Leigh-Ann Zaolino has had a much different experience. Zaolino told the Chronicle she has had to deal with the recycling center’s pungent smell ever since moving across the street from the site in 2002, and she has noticed no improvement since the odor suppression system was added. Instead, she said the aroma has been as bad as usual.

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“It’s a very obnoxious odor, kind of akin to the smell of raw sewage,” Zaolino said in a June 1 phone interview, adding that the smell affects her quality of life. “You can’t even sit outside on your own deck. You can’t open the windows when it’s like that.”

Zaolino has not been quiet about her discontent, either. Through the years, the resident has filed numerous complaints with the Essex Regional Health Commission, each prompting a responder to inspect the air around her home. According to documents she provided to the Chronicle, four of the complaints she has made since 2015 were verified by the commission — two in 2015 and two in 2016. Reliable was fined between \$750 and \$2,000 for each one.

Yet Zaolino also pointed out that those air tests are very subjective — basically, an inspector must judge that the smell is consistently strong for a certain period of time in order to verify the complaint. And she said wind direction plays a large role in the results. She said the wind could blow a pungent odor toward her house but, by the time the inspector arrives, it might be faint because the wind has shifted. That is why some of her other complaints, including four this year, have gone unverified, she said.

Most recently, Zaolino said she has been contacting the township and the Reliable workers at the recycling center directly with her concerns. They seem interested in what she has to say, but the resident said she is unsure if even they know how to completely resolve the odor problem. That is upsetting to Zaolino, who said she has had chronic migraines and sinus infections since moving to her house and being exposed to the center’s smell. She added that she is always worried about her property value suffering as well.

Her own suggestions for fixing the issue include spreading lime at the site, which she read could fight the odor. Zaolino also said the recycling center should take in less material for mulch since she believes that would lead to less of a smell. And she thinks the township should step in to ensure that happens.

“They could be a little more proactive if they wanted to be,” Zaolino said.

Scaling back on the mulching will not necessarily reduce the odor, though, DeFeo said. The consultant said wood and leaves emit a natural aroma as they break down that cannot be avoided. Taking in less of these might reduce the smell, he said, but there is also a chance that the odor will be just as noticeable depending on the materials. If he found that too much material on site was causing an issue, he said he would simply order it to be removed.

The consultant also pointed out that the state allows Reliable to have a certain amount of material at the site. Sticking to that amount has been an issue in the past, with a search of NJDEP inspection reports through 2012 showing violations in four inspections as a result of exceeding the 7,500 cubic yard limit for unprocessed material and/or the 7,500 cubic yard limit for processed material. But those violations occurred between 2012 and 2015, with no such violations listed for 2016 or 2017. DeFeo added that the recycling center is usually compliant on that front whenever he inspects the site.

Whenever DeFeo does see something he wants changed, he said Reliable is always willing to comply. Though any site is bound to have issues in need of fixing, he said the West Orange Recycling Center is actually relatively stellar.

“The center right now is in the best condition I’ve seen it in in 15 years,” DeFeo said. “Right now it’s in excellent condition.”

The township is also laudable for its interest in the center, DeFeo said. Most New Jersey recycling centers are inspected only once per quarter, but he said West Orange has him check out its own site twice a month. He said he rarely deals with municipalities that are so responsive.

West Orange will continue to be responsive too, according to township business administrator Jack Sayers, who said the township is currently researching whether the odor suppression system can be expanded on the site. Additionally, he stressed that addressing the odor issue is a priority.

“We work diligently alongside of the people who are using the recycling center to try and control the odor whenever it happens,” Sayers told the Chronicle in a June 2 phone interview.

◆ FEATURED, Reliable Wood Products, West Orange Environmental Center



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