

The Community of Lincolnville

Living with Landfills



Lincolnville Landfill, September 2013. Photo Credit: ENRICH Project

“There were no checks and balances. I remember old transformers with the PCBs running out of them, dead animals, you name it. Everything and anything went into that landfill site.”

James Desmond is describing a poorly designed first generation dump built in his home community of Lincolnville.

A small African Nova Scotian community in the heart of Guysborough County, Lincolnville has suffered one of the most serious and long-standing cases of environmental racism in Nova Scotia. Black Loyalists founded Lincolnville in 1784 after the British Government failed to follow through with a promised 3,000 acres of land in a different location. Families were driven inland, away from the white population where they were forced to become squatters on the rocky land that is now Lincolnville.

In 1974, a first-generation landfill was opened one kilometer away from the community. As Desmond described, many dangerous items and substances were thrown into the landfill at that time. Since then, the community has been concerned about the potential impacts of various contaminants, including cadmium, phenol, and toluene. In 2006, the Municipality of the District of Guysborough closed the dump and almost immediately opened a second-generation landfill in the same location. The new site accepts waste from across northern Nova Scotia, including as far away as Cape Breton.

Sadly, Lincolnville’s experience is echoed across African Nova Scotian and Mi’kmaq communities. A 2002 study found that 30% of African Nova Scotians live within five kilometres of a dump. And these disproportionate impacts are part of a larger racist pattern of displacement and

blocked access to land and resources. As Desmond says, “*Waste and race go hand in hand here in Nova Scotia.*”



Lincolnville Landfill (aerial view), May 2015. Photo Credit: Silver Donald Cameron

Over past decades, community members in Lincolnville have repeatedly voiced concerns about their individual and community health and the negative economic consequences of hosting two large waste sites.

Some of those concerns include:

- A possible link between landfill contaminants and high rates of cancer (especially stomach cancer), asthma, and other illnesses in the community;
- The impact of the landfill on the community’s way of life, including social and psychological stressors associated with the landfill (foul smell, bird waste, an increase in traffic, increase in bears, raccoons, skunks, and insects)
- Environmentally hazardous methods used to dispose of waste at the first-generation landfill site;
- The negative economic fall-out the landfill has caused and the failure of government to provide full reparations and compensation for the impact the landfill has had on the community, including land displacement, health costs, and environmental contamination.

The community members did not receive a fair and effective public engagement process prior to the siting of the second landfill site. Rather community members found the process to be inaccessible, lacking inclusiveness and transparency. Many deemed the tactics used by government and consultants to be intimidating and not open to discussion that was valuable to the community such as alternatives and compensation. There was no funding made available for the community to hire expertise or support to engage in the consultation process.

What if Nova Scotia had an Environmental Bill of Rights?

If the Nova Scotia Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) was in place in 2006 a second-generation landfill site would not have been placed in the community of Lincolnville unless the community supported the project, was appropriately compensated for taking the site and the social, health, economic and environmental impacts were duly considered.

The NS EBR would place a burden on government to ensure decision-making processes are transparent and the community is provided with *all* of the information in an accessible format and with the support to analyze and evaluate that information. Future decisions that impact a community in this way will have full, inclusive, and equitable participation.

The NS EBR will increase awareness of the legacy of environmental racism in Nova Scotia, as well as acknowledge and validate historical and present-day human rights violations from siting polluting industries in Lincolnville and similar communities. For the community of Lincolnville an effective EBR will provide them with better access to justice to require the removal, clean up, or remediation of environmentally hazardous industries, such as waste sites.

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