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## **ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS SUE CASELLA WASTE SYSTEMS OVER CONTAMINATED DRINKING WELLS AND TOXIC POLLUTION FROM A LEAKING LANDFILL**

CHARLTON, MA – Toxics Action Center and Environment Massachusetts announced today that they have filed a lawsuit in the federal court in Worcester against Casella Waste Systems, Southbridge Recycling & Disposal Park, and the Town of Southbridge over the release of toxic pollutants from the Southbridge Landfill that have contaminated drinking water wells and a nearby stream and wetlands.

The complaint filed in U.S. District Court today alleges that the Landfill is contaminating wells that supply nearby homes in Charlton and Sturbridge with drinking water, which constitutes an “imminent and substantial endangerment to health and the environment” in violation of the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. The complaint also alleges that the Landfill is violating the Clean Water Act by discharging arsenic, iron, manganese, 1,4-dioxane (a suspected carcinogen) and other pollutants into wetlands that surround the Landfill. The groups are seeking an injunction that would require Casella to contain or remediate the pollution and to hook up residents’ homes to a clean water supply, and a civil penalty for the company’s violations.

“This is not the first time we’ve seen Casella be a bad neighbor to families and neighborhoods in New England,” said Claire Miller of Toxics Action Center, “I am proud to stand with concerned residents, the scores of people who can no longer drink their well water, this is a public health crisis and it is unacceptable.”

As alleged in the complaint filed today, at present 88 wells have been contaminated with one or more pollutants - 45 in Charlton and 43 in Sturbridge, demonstrating the risk to the greater aquifer. Pollutants found in wells include lead, 1,4-dioxane, trichloroethylene and other chlorinated volatile organic compounds, and arsenic. Thirty-six wells have had concentrations of lead, 1,4-dioxane, or other pollutants that exceed safe drinking thresholds — 9 Charlton and 27 in Sturbridge.

Eighty residential wells near the Landfill have tested positive for the presence of lead, 1,4-dioxane, or chlorinated volatile organic compounds such as trichloroethylene (another carcinogen). Concentrations of these pollutants exceed safe drinking water thresholds in many of these wells, and dozens of other nearby homes are at risk of the contamination spreading further. Casella’s own reports to the Massachusetts Department of Environment Protection (“DEP”) show that the Landfill has for many years been releasing these pollutants into the groundwater, yet DEP has not stepped in to force the Landfill to prevent or clean up the pollution. Casella’s reports to DEP demonstrate that the Landfill is also discharging chemicals and metals into McKinstry Brook and its surrounding wetlands in Southbridge and Sturbridge.

“No one should have to deal with toxic contamination in their local wetlands and streams,” said Ben Hellerstein, Stated Director of Environment Massachusetts. “The Southbridge Landfill must comply with the Clean Water Act in order to protect McKinstry Brook and its surrounding wetlands, and the wildlife that depends on them.”

The Southbridge Landfill is the second-largest landfill facility in Massachusetts, and is permitted to accept more than 400,000 tons of solid waste per year. It is owned by the Town of Southbridge, but is operated by Casella and its subsidiary, Southbridge Recycling. Casella, one of the largest waste collection firms in the Northeast, is currently seeking permission from the Commonwealth and the Town of Southbridge to expand the size and waste-handling capacity of the Landfill. DEP recently rejected Casella’s application to expand the Landfill onto land in Charlton and Sturbridge, but Casella has appealed that decision.

“To add an even bigger insult to this pollution injury, Casella wants to expand the mess they’ve made by increasing the size of their landfill,” remarked Janet Domenitz, Exec Dir of MASSPIRG. “That’s a terrible idea for our health, for the environment, and for the quality of life here in the tri-town community and beyond.”

Toxics Action Center and Environment Massachusetts filed the complaint together with ninety-nine individuals who are neighbors and former neighbors of the Landfill. In the jointly filed lawsuit, these neighbors also seek compensation from the Landfill for the harm done to their well-being and their property.

*Toxics Action Center is a non-profit organization that works side-by-side with communities throughout New England to prevent and clean up pollution at the local level. For more information, visit [www.toxicsaction.org](http://www.toxicsaction.org). Environment Massachusetts is a citizen-based non-profit environmental advocacy organization that promotes clean air, clean water, and open space protection. It is a state project of Environment America. For more information, visit [www.environmentmassachusetts.org](http://www.environmentmassachusetts.org). The groups are represented by the Boston-based, non-profit National Environmental Law Center, which represents citizen groups across the country in actions to enforce the nation’s environmental laws; and attorney David Nicholas of Newton, Massachusetts. The ninety-nine individual plaintiffs are represented by attorney James Vander Salm of Longmeadow, Massachusetts.*

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