Saturday Soapbox: DTG operations have made life miserable for the neighbors

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I love Yakima! Yakima has been my home since 1986. I love the variety of activities available, especially the tranquil, country atmosphere. But that peacefulness is now threatened.

I live below the DTG (formerly Anderson) landfill and mining operations near Rocky Top trails.

Since DTG’s purchase, neighbors have endured odor, litter, dust and nighttime operations. The company is undergoing a major expansion with what seems like little, or belated, regulatory oversight by responsible government officials. I’m concerned that our local regulators are not holding DTG to the same standards it requires for its individual residents.

Here are some of the specific concerns my neighbors and I have:

• Individuals in Yakima can be fined for littering, yet years of complaints about trash blowing off DTG’s landfill have never resulted in any known fines.
• Individuals are subject to multiple permits and regulations to sink a well, yet landfill companies with vast potential to pollute our groundwater often seem to get a wink and nod by regulatory agencies. In this case, we have serious questions about the reliability of the ground water monitoring system the county set up for DTG.
• To protect our air, individuals must obtain permits to burn weeds, but we have evidence that suggests toxic emissions are coming out from the buried fill at DTG’s operation. And we are worried local regulators will bow to pressure from DTG to minimize their costs rather than require the company do what is necessary to protect public health.
• Individuals who create noise nuisances would expect to hear from local authorities, yet DTG disturbed the nighttime quiet of our neighborhood by crushing gravel after hours for several weeks this spring. The company’s conditional use permit states that operations can only continue between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.
• A mining permit expansion, including permission for an asphalt batch facility, was issued in 2004. Now, with DTG’s partnership with Granite Construction, we fear we’re facing the possibility that asphalt operations could be the next thing we’ll have to endure.
• Counties with regional solid waste landfills often have a “host fee” paid on each ton of waste dumped from outside the county. The revenue generated supports landfill oversight including monitoring, inspections and investigations. We would like county commissioners to support such a fee. A significant percentage of waste entering the landfill comes from King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. They should pay extra to dump here.
• We have filed more than 100 complaints to local health and environmental authorities so far, and we’ve been asked to document our concerns at each turn. Isn’t that government’s responsibility?

As frustrating as all this has been, there are some silver linings. I’ve learned what wonderful neighbors are all about and we’ve seen the power of banding together for something we’re passionate about! Our goal is simply to help our local officials recognize the need to exercise their power and do their duty to protect our health and environment.

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