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Officials hope to clean up landfill trouble

By **John Hilliard**/ Staff Writer
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Board of Health officials hope a "renewed" management plan will clean up years of personnel and legal trouble at the town landfill.

The plan is an effort "to remind the employees that they have to be professional to co-workers and residents," said Board of Health Chairwoman Michelle Wolf. "They don't have to be best friends on their own time."

The Board of Health's new plan include greater day-to-day oversight of the landfill by Health Director Steve Calichman, regular reports on landfill business presented to the Board of Health and bi-monthly Health Department staff meetings with landfill workers.

"All employees at the landfill must work with one another in a professional manner and must comply with applicable workplace policies. Employees who choose not to conduct themselves in a professional manner and in accordance with policy will be disciplined appropriately," states the plan.

The landfill staff must also attend mandatory customer service training on Dec. 13 as well as meet with a "teambuilding" consultant on Dec. 16.

Calichman and Landfill Superintendent Charles Kiley are also asked to work closely with Town Administrator Fred Turkington and Human Resources Director John Senchyshyn on issues related to the hiring of outside contractors.

"It's a renewed effort on the part of the Board of Health to address issues at the landfill," said Senchyshyn. "We expect everyone to adhere to these rules."

The town landfill has been a source of controversy for years, from both ongoing employee disputes and a pair of allegations of illegal dumping made to the Department of Environmental Protection. The two illegal dumping charges were settled between the state and the town in 2002 and 2004 at a total cost of more than \$250,000.

The latest round of allegations alone caused Wayland to spend \$146,000 on legal fees and \$5,000 to settle the case with the state.

Kiley credited the Board of Health's "serious" effort to deal with the issues surrounding the landfill.

"The board we have now is probably the best board we've had in years," said Kiley, who also credited the Health Department staff as "the most dedicated group of people I've ever worked with."

However, Kiley believes the new policies alone will not be enough to improve conditions at the landfill.

"I think there would be turnover in the staff before it happens," said Kiley. "I don't think it will change."

Kiley blames employee complaints and a lack of workplace discipline for the facility's woes.

"They all know there is a problem there," he said. "They got to do something."

Kiley said after last week's meeting, a landfill employee filed another complaint with town officials.

Neither employee Robert Robinson or Health Director Calichman had any comment on the board's new landfill plan.

"If they want me to have a more active role, I will do that," said Calichman.

A 64-page town prepared report issued in January defended the landfill but found "a deep level of distrust, anger and resentment exists among a number of individuals who spend their daily lives working there."

In June, Kiley and long time employee Robinson - who made the most recent dumping allegations to state officials - filed police reports which alleged harassment while working at

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the landfill.

Board of Health Chairwoman Wolf said the plan is a combination of both new and existing policies designed to improve working conditions at the landfill, which has support from both selectmen and Personnel Board.

"It's a recommitment to what we did before," said Wolf, who added the plan is not meant to be punitive.

Wolf acknowledged that dealing with ongoing personnel troubles will not be easy, but believes the board can make changes.

"(For) someone on the outside, it looks like nothing is happening," said Wolf, who added her board has been dealing with personnel issues during closed-door grievance hearings.

Replacing the landfill staff is not an option due to union contracts and other agreements, nor has the Board of Health recommended such changes, said Wolf.

She disagreed with Kiley's statement that working conditions would only improve with turnover among landfill employees, and "would hope" the landfill staff helps to improve the operation.

"Everybody has to make an effort," said Wolf.

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