Elevated Temperature Landfills (ETLF’s) Understanding the Issues for Site Workers

Gary Pons, CIH, CSP, Health and Safety Director, SCS Engineers
F. Daniel Brennan, P.E., Senior Project Engineer, SCS Engineers
SWANApalooza 2017
March 29, 2017
Elevated Temperature Landfill (ETLF) - Agenda

- Definition – Reaction, Not a Fire
- Several large ETLF’s to date
- Symptoms, Challenges
- Risk Factors
- “Contain & Manage”
- H&S Exposures
- H&S Controls
Conventional Landfill Fires

- Often caused by $O_2$-intrusion from overdrawn LFG extraction well
- Isolated, shallow, confined
- Elevated temps, stressed gas system (GCCS), isolated settlement around well
- Char, smoke, even flame
- Small-area, short-term fix
- Fix is usually enhanced cover
ET Landfills
(aka Area-wide LF Reactions)

- Not a landfill fire
- Start small, but can cover dozens of landfill acres over time
- Run deeper than landfill fires
- Lacking O2
- The primary gas ratio (CH$_4$/CO$_2$) is diminishing or very low (<1.0 or <<1.0)
- Do not appear to be triggered by GCCS
ET Landfill Symptoms

- Gas composition changes – CH4 and CO2
- H₂ and CO appear in the landfill gas
- LF Gas and liquid temperatures increase
  - Temperature range (Gas and liquid): 131 to 300 degrees F
- Gas generation volumes increase (increased pressures in the LF)
- Liquid volumes increase (leachate and condensate)
- Leachate and gas quality deteriorate
ETLF Effects on LF Components

- Settlement, cracks, fissures
- Significant LF volume reduction
- Impacts on GCCS in wellfield
- Impacts on blower/flare station
- Liquids management issues
- Leachate management issues
- Fugitive emissions and odors
ET Landfill Solutions

• Approach = “Contain & Manage”
• Enhanced cover – soil, EGC
• Enhanced GCCS
• Enhanced processing blower/flare station
• Liquids management
• Leachate management/treatment
• Fugitive emission/odor control
ET Landfill Solutions (Cont’d)

• Stabilization to mitigate effects of volume reduction – on stormwater mgt, GCCS, cap, etc.

• Long-term, enhanced O&M
LFG in an ET Landfill

- **Methane Fraction**
- **Non-Methane fraction**
- **% Methane**

**Collect LFG (MMscf)**
- **2010:** 448 (301 Methane, 147 Non-Methane)
- **2011:** 691 (312 Methane, 379 Non-Methane)
- **2012:** 1,673 (495 Methane, 1,178 Non-Methane)
- **2013:** 3,144 (463 Methane, 2,681 Non-Methane)
- **2014:** 3,604 (422 Methane, 3,182 Non-Methane)

**CH₄ Content (%):**
- **2010:** 40.2%
- **2011:** 31.1%
- **2012:** 22.8%
- **2013:** 12.8%
- **2014:** 10.5%
Health and Safety (H&S) Risks at ETLF’s to Site Workers

- High Temperature Gas
- High Temperature Liquids
- Leachate
  - Lower pH (<6), higher concentration of VOCs, increased electrical conductivity
- Odors
- Excessive Landfill Pressure (Artesian wells)
- Extreme Subsidence (settlement)
- Degradation of GCCS System Components
- Elevated Hydrogen Considerations
H&S Risk Management - Exposed Geomembrane Covers

- Used to control fugitive odors
- Hazard in wet or frozen conditions
- Cannot have equipment drive on it
- Usually have GCCS piping above EGC
- Above grade GCCS becomes walking hazard
- EGC becomes “trampolines” if localized settlement occurs
H&S Risks (Cont’d) - GCCS Components

- High temps may require steel well casings (hot to touch)
  - Use infrared thermometer to test objects before handling
- Usual flex hose will degrade and could split or burst
- High pressure in ETLFs along with excessive liquids could make extraction wells become artesian
- Localized rapid settlement could leave wellheads tough to access safely
Steel well that needs to be cut down due to differential settling
H&S Risks (Cont’d) - GCCS Well Drilling

- Exclusion Zone
- Buddy System
- Airborne hazards
- Odors
  - Vacuum box
- Special spoils handling
- Sonic drill rig
- PPE Needed
Odor Control Considerations

• Fugitive emissions through landfill surface
  – Need effective gas system (GCCS)
  – Need effective cap/cover (EGCs, e.g., EVOH)

• Uncombusted gas at control device due to low heat content of gas (200 BTU/cf)
Other ELTF Observations to Consider

- Visual inspections of gas collection components for damage and/or changes
- Inspections of leachate components
- Cover and elevation observation and surveys
- Waste Composition (Dark and wet)
Final Thoughts

- Landfill reaction sites (aka ET landfills) are not landfill fires
- Each ETLF is unique...avoid generalizations and understand that the hazards they pose are site-specific.
- Deep, wet, massive landfill areas more susceptible to ETLF conditions developing.
- Understanding of reaction mechanisms developing. More study needed.
- Waste acceptance may be an issue
- Effective communication and coordination between all parties is the key to success!
Final Thoughts (Cont’d)

- Onsite issues for workers are different with ETLFs than normal LF
- O&M routines are more challenging and the frequency of repairs sharply increases
- EGCs control fugitive odors but create many obstacles for workers
- Rapid settlement creates challenges for the EGCs and the GCCS wells
Final Thoughts (Cont’d)

• Excessive pressures in the landfill strain pump repair routines and place excessive liquids in GCCS piping

• High levels of hydrogen require different “flame arrestors” (either deflagration arrestors or liquid seals)

• Harsh environment deteriorate valve seals making emergency shutdown of pipe sections problematic
Final Thoughts (Cont’d)

- Odors are an on-going characteristic of ETLFs
- Good interaction with regulators is key
- Once the ET condition develops, it may peak and stop spreading in 3-5 years, but enviro effects continue long-term
- No need to panic – only a minority of large, deep, wet sites affected so far
- But those sites affected can incur significant costs