

# Briefing Note

## Questions from Amanda Milling MP

14 September  
2016

### Fire at Oak Tree Farm, Slitting Mill, Rugeley, Staffordshire.

- 1) How the waste was allowed to burn in the first instance?
- 2) What waste permissions the site owner has?
- 3) What investigations has the site operator been subject to?

We don't yet know the precise cause of the fire but will investigate this with the Fire Brigade. Our primary focus at the moment is to protect the local community and their environment from the impacts of the fire and to enable it to be safely extinguished as soon as possible.

The site is an illegal waste site and does not have any current or valid waste permissions. The waste at the site is predominantly shredded wood.

The site is subject to an ongoing investigation by **Staffordshire County Council** and ourselves into illegal activity at the site. **Staffordshire County Council** had served enforcement notices on the landowner and the person who has deposited the waste to clear the site of waste. The deadline for compliance was 15 September 2016. Noncompliance with a notice would lead to further enforcement action which could include prosecution, an injunction or other action.

- 4) What actions will the EA be taking against the landowner in light of this particular fire?
- 5) What actions the EA will be taking to prevent this happening again in future?

We will work closely with **Staffordshire County Council** to consider the fire alongside the ongoing investigation into both the landowner and the person who has deposited the waste. Our primary outcome is to ensure the site is cleared of waste which will prevent the risk of further fires.

Additionally we are running media campaigns to increase awareness in waste producers that their waste must only be sent to legitimate sites and working with local authorities and MPs to raise awareness with landowners of their liability for the cost of site clearance if illegal waste activities have taken place on their land.

- 6) What steps the Environment Agency will be taking in the short term, given the toxicity of the smoke, to protect residents?
- 7) Whether the Environment Agency has evaluated the levels of toxicity on-site and if not, when it will be doing so?
- 8) What the impact is for residents of inhaling the smoke, especially those with chest problems? And what the impact will be on children?

We are working with our multi-agency partners to minimise the impacts and duration of the smoke nuisance from the fire. One important factor that we are actively considering when advising Staffs Fire and Rescue service in fighting the fire is that the site is located in a 'source protection zone' which effectively means that the groundwater beneath it is an important source of drinking water, abstracted by South Staffs Water. Putting large amounts of water on the fire could flush contaminants into the groundwater and cause long term harm to the drinking water supply. The multi-agency group responding to the fire have therefore have had to balance

the unpleasant, short term impacts on air quality with the risk of longer term damage to the drinking water supply. This is why controlled burn, separation and smothering type techniques have primarily been used to fight this fire. The decision on how to fight the fire is made by the Fire Brigade with advice from partners. We provide advice to them (as do the local authority and others as required) about risks and options to support them make that decision.

**Cannock Chase District Councils** air quality team are monitoring and considering the impacts on health and they, with support from Public Health England, can provide more detailed information on your specific health questions.

The waste involved is not toxic and the general multi-agency advice for fires of this type is for people living within the area affected by the smoke plume to stay indoors with windows and doors shut and to see your GP with any specific concerns or ill health.

customer service line  
03708 506 506

incident hotline  
0800 80 70 60

floodline  
0345 988 1188  
0845 988 1188

[www.gov.uk/environment-agency](http://www.gov.uk/environment-agency)