

OPENING COMMENTS
BY
HONOURABLE ROBERT D. PICKERSGILL,
MINISTER OF WATER, LAND, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE
TO
ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION
ON
FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2012 @ 2:00 P.M.

- ~~Apologize for the delay in convening~~
- ~~Explain the purpose of the meeting, that is to respond to Jamaica Civil Society Coalition (JCSC), commend JCSC for the constructive engagement on a matter of public concern~~
- ~~Underscore the role of civil society and the position of the government on constructive dialogue etc~~

STATEMENT

The Country experienced an unfortunate and most regretful experience from the fire and associated smoke nuisance from the Riverton Disposal Site over the period February 6-13, 2012. The response to contain and extinguish the fire was swift but the response teams were challenged in overcoming the fires due to many factors. It is a fact that the disposal site was not being properly managed.

Proper management of the disposal site requires that the solid waste is compacted and covered to reduce the possibility of fires and prevent the breeding of insects and vermin. Lack of budgetary support to procure the required cover material and to keep the heavy duty equipment functional and effective played a major role. This impacted on public health and the environment and caused extensive loss to businesses and affected the normal daily activities of citizens

I must make it clear that the government has nothing to hide and is not involved in a cover-up on the matter of the fire at the disposal site. In fact, Minister Arscott has been providing regular updates on the state of control of the fire and outlined some of the challenges faced.

It is a fact that the regulatory agencies were challenged. The assessment of air quality presents major challenges. NEPA operates four ambient air quality monitoring stations in the Corporate Area. The stations collect monitoring data routinely but were not deployed to measure air quality specifically for a fire from the disposal site. During the fire deployment of additional monitoring stations was restricted due to sheer inadequate numbers of stations, malfunctioning pieces of equipment and inadequate capacity in the private sector. In addition, the suite of parameters that can be tested (for) is limited. Generally, the capacity is to test for particulate matter (PM10), Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_x).

I am advised that these are good criteria air quality indicators but there is need for capacity in testing for other pollutant, generally referred to as volatile organic compounds (VOC).

NEPA and Ministry of Health collaborated and deployed monitoring stations within critical corridors and therefore have a good appreciation of the fire (and smoke nuisance over the period). We are making the report of the assessment available.

NEPA has determined that approximately \$80M would be required to install routine monitoring stations in specific high population areas: Spanish Town, May Pen, Mandeville, Montego Bay, Portmore and additional sites in KMR.

The Ministry of Health has reported an increase in respiratory illness cases at some health facilities, particularly those in close proximity to the Site and Minister Ferguson will expand on the health-related issues and future plans during the discussions.

Minister Arscott will provide clarity on the actions NSWMA has taken to prevent recurrence and future plans for the disposal site. In general, the government would need to identify a minimum of \$US 20-100M in the long term to construction appropriate sanitary landfills to serve the country.

As Minister of Environment & Climate Change (and NEPA's Minister), the CEO-NEPA has been instructed to proactively pursue the NSWMA to ensure that it obtains the required Environmental Permit, with specific and general conditions with which the NSWMA must comply. I expect that the NSWMA will respond likewise and obtain this EP by June, 2012 and adopt and implement the appropriate best practice to comply with NRCA Act 9 (which binds the Crown).

On behalf of the Government I wish to apologize to those individuals and businesses affected, I am confident that the Regulators will take the required action to obtain compliance from the NSWMA. The Government will not abdicate its responsibility and will be seeking to provide the NSWMA with resources, within the present challenging fiscal space, to allow it to perform and be held accountable.

We look forward to working with Jamaica Civil Society Coalition on this and other matters.