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North Providence neighborhood complains of air-quality issues from Johnston asphalt plant

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By Mark Reynolds

Journal Staff Writer



Bill Roy and his neighbor from across the street, Nancy Bolduc, stand on Roy's property in North Providence which has a view across the Allendale Mill Pond to the Johnston Asphalt plant.

The Providence Journal / Mary Murphy

NORTH PROVIDENCE, R.I. — With its piles of paving materials and its plumes of smoke, the asphalt plant has always been a visible presence on the Johnston side of Allendale Mill Pond, across the water from Nancy Bolduc's neighborhood.

But the fumes of asphalt manufacturing whisked into the neighborhood by prevailing winds have never been as bad as in recent years, according to Bolduc and other residents, who complain of nausea.

Environmental authorities say nothing significant has changed in the operation of Johnston Asphalt, at

100 Allendale Ave. and the facility's asphalt production process is within the law.

Nonetheless, Bolduc and some of her neighbors are on a campaign to get Mayor Charles A. Lombardi and the Town Council to do something to improve the air quality in their neighborhood along Woonasquatucket Avenue.

The state Department of Environmental Management staff have fielded 11 air-related complaints, conducted seven investigations, one of them as recently as Dec. 8, and found no violations of air-quality standards.



The Johnston Asphalt plant is just across Allendale Mill Pond from a North Providence neighborhood.

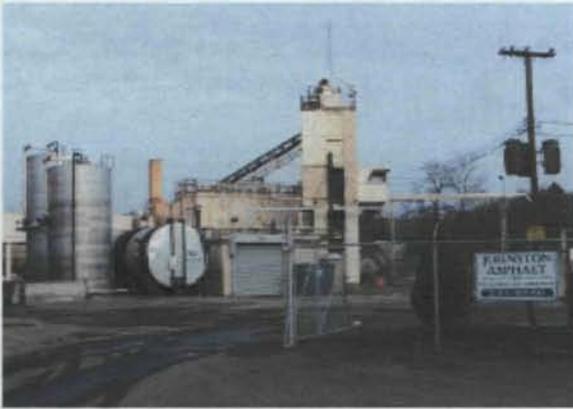
During a more detailed evaluation of the plant in May, inspectors found the facility's operations in compliance with regulations and reported no major changes in activities that would account for what some North Providence residents say has been a worsening of odors in recent years, according to Doug McVay, chief of the DEM's air resources office.

Lombardi said he has set up a Jan. 5 meeting when the DEM's chief specialist on air quality, Christopher R. John, will address the situation.

"I don't know at this point in time that the issue is with the company," said Lombardi. "DEM is the one who is supposed to be monitoring the quality of air."

Johnston Asphalt has operated on Allendale Avenue since the mid-1970s, according to the DEM.

All States Materials Group, based in Sunderland, Mass., has owned the facility since 2002. Efforts to reach a company spokesman were unsuccessful.



Johnston Asphalt, at 100 Allendale Ave., in Johnston, has been at the same location since the 1970s.

Nancy Bolduc and her sister, Mary Bolduc, have lived near the pond, which is fed by the Woonasquatucket River, since the '60s.

Nancy Bolduc and other residents describe soot-like substances on the sides of houses and clouds of dust and smoke drifting across the water from the asphalt plant.

Bill Roy, a 67-year-old retired North Providence firefighter, said the pollution forms a slick on the surface of his swimming pool.

For the past five years, he said, foul-smelling air has forced him to keep his windows closed six days a week, with Sunday being the exception.

"It's the only day they don't operate," Roy said.

One resident new to the neighborhood, Anthony Janello, citing his many exchanges with DEM officials, questioned the agency's techniques for monitoring air conditions in the neighborhood.

In late November, Janello and nine residents wrote their complaints and presented them to the Town Council.

Johnston Mayor Joseph M. Polisena said he is not aware of any similar complaints in Johnston, but he will discuss the complaints from the North Providence residents with the town solicitor.

"This is not on the back burner," Polisena said, noting that a change in wind patterns could easily bring the same odors to Johnston neighborhoods. "This is on the front burner."

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