Thank you, Mayor Russell, for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight. Thank you to all who have supported my work, and to all who came out to listen to me speak.

My name is Evey Weisblat, and I'm a freelance investigative reporter based in Benton County. I have been doing environmental journalism for the last five years, during which time I've reported on air pollution and water pollution from various industrial sites and the impacts it has had on fenceline communities like Tontitown. I moved here last year from North Carolina, where I reported on water contamination from Chemours, the spin-off company of DuPont, which you might be familiar with from the film Dark Waters.

I saw a Facebook post back in September about the Eco-Vista Landfill, and it immediately caught my attention. Perhaps to the dismay of my husband and my bank account, I have been singularly focused on following that lead. I have spent the last six months investigating the Eco-Vista Landfill, and the impacts it has had on this community. Tonight, I want to share with you my findings, which will be published in The Arkansas Times, a statewide news outlet, on April 1. The story should be available in print and online, and I hope you will take the opportunity to read it.

As with any medium, there are certain limitations to journalism, so not all of what I will share with you tonight will be included in the article, which is why I am extra grateful to the Tontitown city council for giving me the opportunity to share with y'all the unabridged findings.

My investigation into the Eco-Vista Landfill has revealed an urgent threat to public health and safety that has been ignored, and in some cases exacerbated by the inaction of Arkansas state regulators, particularly the Arkansas Division of Environmental Quality - ADEQ. The crisis is three-pronged: air pollution, water contamination, and land instability. I'll briefly touch on each of these aspects.

Air pollution

First, is the obvious, air pollution. Because you are all familiar with the impacts the landfill has had on air quality — you know better than anyone what it smells like, the impacts those odors, the health effects of the vapors — I will not go into the weeds on that aspect, other than to say, based on my significant research, your concerns are valid. The chemicals detected in previous air sampling are consistent with the health symptoms you are experiencing, according to Dr. Philip Landrigan, a nationally recognized public health expert who was consulted for this report. Moreover, my data analysis of 726 complaints in the ADEQ's database shows that one in three complaints about Eco-Vista reports a health symptom. And 99% of complaints that mention a health symptom also mention an odor. It's an incredibly tight correlation.

But let me address the elephant in the room. Many of you were frustrated, understandably so, to learn that, in the latest round of testing last May, ADEQ essentially absolved Eco-Vista of responsibility for the pollution. You were also frustrated no doubt to hear that the pollution

detected was largely consistent with normal air quality in the United States. Let me assuage your concerns: this is misleading.

There are a few glaring issues with that test which I have uncovered. First, the 2025 test claimed the pollutants detected were largely consistent with background levels in the U.S., but that is a misleading statement. Some compounds detected were significantly higher than EPA screening levels used to determine whether further investigation of air pollution is warranted. The concerns about acrolein and benzene in previous tests were not disproved by this test. In fact, Benzene levels were actually higher in the 2025 test than in the April 2024, rising to 0.77 parts per billion, which is twice as high as what was documented in the April test. The 2025 test also found the same amount of acrolein - at 0.45 parts per billion. It detected 36 of the 50 compounds tested for; the vast majority of compounds detected in the 2025 test, Eco-Vista emits.

The Arkansas Department of Health released a health assessment of CTEH's study in January of this year. The findings were alarming. The assessment acknowledged that the levels of one toxic chemical, acrylonitrile, represent a health risk of 1 in 10,000 additional cancer cases, the highest public health risk level. The health report also confirmed acrylonitrile exposure includes symptoms commonly documented by residents, including "nose and throat irritation, difficulty breathing, nausea, dizziness, weakness, headache, impaired judgment, and convulsions." Although DEQ acknowledged that Eco-Vista is the only facility in Washington County that has reported emitting acrylonitrile, the agency again pointed to other sources, and said it has enlisted the EPA to further investigate.

Second, the testing claimed hydrogen sulfide and sulfur dioxide were not detected, but it used equipment that was insensitive and notoriously finicky to look for these highly toxic compounds. Hydrogen sulfide is synonymous with the rotten egg odor so many of you have reported smelling. But CTEH used real-time air monitors with a detection threshold of 0.1 parts per million to look for hydrogen sulfide. That is about 200 times higher than what the human nose can detect. When Tontitown commissioned basic air sampling on the lift station using more appropriate equipment, hydrogen sulfide was detected as high as 0.26 parts per million – which is enough to cause health symptoms, and is about 2,000 times higher than background levels.

Third, for lack of a better term, the test was rigged. Public records obtained confirmed that testing had been done in a way that diminished the pollutants detected. ADEQ ordered Waste Management to provide proof it was performing daily cover only during the study period; WM was instructed to photograph covered working faces on May 2 – an order that the agency rescinded on May 20, shortly after the study concluded. Studies show uncovered working faces account for 79% of landfill air emissions. Moreover, CTEH used the fact that the landfill was covered on the weekends to determine the source of the air pollution and orders. But since the landfill was covered the entire time of air sampling, CTEH's methodology is completely redundant.

Water contamination

OK, let's move onto water pollution. As many of you know, we are on Karst topography. Water here does not stay put. It can travel miles in a matter of days, and unlike other topographies, water pollutants do not get filtered or diluted when they enter the water table – they seep through the porous limestone. The Karst bedrock that makes this region so special — that gives us beautiful caves, picturesque bluffs, natural springs, and scenic waterways with clear blue water — is also what makes this area uniquely vulnerable to water pollution. In addition to travelling quickly in unpredictable directions, groundwater also does not stay below ground in a Karst – springs shoot it back up to the surface, where it can mingle with surface water used by our public water systems. The reverse is true, with sinking streams that flow directly into the water table.

In a perfect system, a landfill is a closed loop. Liners hold back leachate, and the water table never comes into contact with the highly toxic landfill liquid. But even in the most well-maintained landfills, it's almost impossible to prevent leachate leaks.

There is no question in my mind that leachate from Eco-Vista has already seeped into the groundwater here. State inspectors documented multiple leachate leaks in March of 2023, during an unusual period of increased inspections. Inspections got less thorough, and less frequent, after that, but the fact remains – if that much leachate was leaking in just a three-week period, when the cameras were on, how much has escaped when no one is looking? This is especially concerning because we know that Eco-Vista's waste cells have a direct flow path off-site to Wildcat Creek and several local springs, from the dye test that was done here a few years ago. Other dye tests in earlier years have shown similar, fast-moving connections.

You can imagine a landfill liner as two cups. The primarily liner is the top cup, and the secondary liner is the bottom cup. Inside the bottom cup, there is a collection sump that detects leaks, known as the leak detection system (LDS). Eco-Vista's LDS is frequently saturated with leachate. In its December 2025 water monitoring report, the leak detection system showed liquid with ammonia and chloride concentrations nearly identical to those found in the leachate (the first cup). While ADEQ has tried to downplay these detections, there is no getting around the facts: If water matching the chemical composition of leachate is frequently found in the leak detection system, the primary liner has already breached.

Still, the state maintains the local groundwater is not contaminated with toxic chemicals from leachate. To test the state's claims, myself and two residents tested a private well located a few hundred feet from the fenceline for PFAS – commonly referred to as "forever chemicals." PFAS are a group of highly toxic and pervasive chemicals that do not break down naturally in the environment or the human body. They are linked to a plethora of health effects, including various cancers, increased cholesterol, reproductive issues, liver damage, kidney damage, thyroid disease and more. Unlike other contaminants that, although harmful, may be from natural processes, PFAS are entirely man-made; they get into local water supplies through industrial manufacturing discharges, firefighting foam runoff at military or airports, landfill leachate leaks, and the application of contaminated biosolids. In fact, a 2021 EPA study found

PFAS in the leachate of 95% of landfills sampled, confirming them as a major source of environmental contamination.

When we tested the local well for "forever chemicals," not only did we find dangerously high concentrations of these toxic chemicals, but we found PFAS that matched the specific chemical fingerprint for landfills. This includes legacy chemicals that have been phased out of use for years, but specifically show up in landfill leachate because of the presence of old consumer waste.

In response to this test, ADEQ specifically said it does not regulate PFAS. Let me say this again: The Arkansas Division of Environmental Quality, charged with protecting this state's waterways, explicitly told me it does not regulate this group of highly toxic and pervasive chemicals. This effectively means any industrial polluter has free reign to discharge "forever chemicals" into the natural state. That affects not only the people in this room, but every citizen of every person in Northwest Arkansas and Northeast Oklahoma that relies on the Illinois River Watershed to survive. It affects every citizen of Arkansas who gets their water from a well.

Elevated Temperature Landfill

Unfortunately, air pollution and water contamination are not Eco-Vista's only problems. A report from Carbon Chicken, the independent engineering firm the city contracted with to test an air filter on the S Pianalto Road lift station a few months ago, concluded via basic air testing that Eco-Vista was showing symptoms of an Elevated Temperature Landfill (ETL)—a subterranean, hot chemical reaction similar to an underground fire, where the trash literally cooks beneath the surface, instead of decomposing normally. The report compared Eco-Vista directly to the Chiquita Canyon Landfill environmental disaster in California, an ETL that has caused widespread toxic air pollution, hazardous leachate spills, and significant health concerns for the surrounding community. The Carbon Chicken report concluded Eco-Vista was experiencing an "unstable biological process that requires immediate diagnostic monitoring."

This is not the only warning sign that Eco-Vista has entered ETL territory. My investigation has uncovered several more alarming signs that landfill's decomposition process has been disrupted, and dangerous heat-generating reactions are taking place below the surface. One such finding is carbon monoxide data. Eco-Vista's air permit reports show Eco-Vista released about 80 tons of carbon monoxide in the last year. Carbon monoxide is a sign of incomplete combustion. In a landfill, it is a strong sign of an ETL, because it is a byproduct of abnormal, heat-generating chemical reactions occurring within the waste mass.

Another symptom of an ETL is widespread, noxious odors reported in the surrounding area of a landfill, and failures of a landfill's gas containment system. Eco-Vista has experienced both of these. The landfill's gas containment systems -- the underground gas wells that extract methane and turn it into marketable natural gas — are struggling. According to federally mandated air permit reports obtained via a public records request, in nearly every report filed over the last five years, the facility has documented a persistent inability to maintain negative pressure at its gas extraction wells. Instead of sucking methane and other landfill gases safely into the collection

system, highly pressurized methane is overwhelming the infrastructure and migrating outward. As this uncontrolled methane travels through the landfill and mixes with underground pockets of oxygen, it creates a massive explosion hazard. At that point, all it takes is a single spark - a bulldozer blade striking a rock, a discarded battery, or the smoldering subsurface reaction beneath the landfill (ETL) - to trigger a catastrophic detonation.

In a landfill like Eco-Vista, which has seen consistent failures to cover waste piles regularly, the risk of oxygen intrusion is amplified. So, too, is the case in a Karst system, where the porous limestone creates open pathways for air to circulate, and to mix with migrating explosive gas from Eco-Vista.

Another symptom of an ETL is subsurface fires. Fires in general are a well-documented issue at Eco-Vista. State and city fire records show Eco-Vista has experienced at least 17 fires in the last 10 years, including three in 2025 alone. During Eco-Vista's permit expansion hearings in 2024, landfill fire expert Todd Thalhamer explicitly warned ADEQ that the facility's lack of planning and flammable cover materials would inevitably cause an uncontrolled fire there that could release toxic gas plumes into the community. He said the landfill's operators "need to plan for a catastrophic event," and specifically warned about subsurface fires at Eco-Vista. Tontitown fire department reports show such a fire occurred exactly as the expert predicted, in November of last year, with a fire that started at the bottom of the waste pit and "rekindled" two days later.

The impacts of an uncontrolled ETL are dire. If nothing is done, not only is there the risk of a life-threatening explosion or uncontrolled fire, there is also the possibility of sinkholes opening up at Eco-Vista, and the leachate leaking into the groundwater supply, where it will cause catastrophic water pollution that would be difficult to fully remediate. And, even without a sinkhole, the liners and gas containment infrastructure can melt under extreme heat, causing more water pollution and toxic gas releases.

To confirm beyond the shadow of a doubt that an ETL is occurring at Eco-Vista, we need to know the temperature of the landfill gas below the surface. But Eco-Vista stopped reporting gas temperatures or oxygen concentrations in its gas wells in 2022. New reporting mechanisms only require pressure to be reported, and rely on the trustworthiness of landfill operators to self-report oxygen or temperature exceedances. In other words, those records are locked behind closed doors at Eco-Vista.

ADEQ refuses to address this issue either. They have taken Eco-Vista's word for it, but have not inspected the applicable records. When I asked ADEQ about the possibility of an ETL developing at Eco-Vista, the agency said it "does not have (an) indication that Eco-Vista Class 1 landfill is experiencing elevated landfill temperature." What about the Class 4?

Conclusion

I do not say all this to scare you. It is entirely possible that Eco-Vista will avoid such a catastrophe. But it is better to be safe than sorry. The repercussions of ignoring the water

pollution and an ETL at Eco-Vista are too grave to accept. Pollution does not respect property boundaries, and it doesn't care about state lines. It doesn't care about class, race, or politics.

To the residents of Tontitown, I have a message for you: You are not crazy. You are not imagining the odors, and you're not making up the symptoms. I've smelled the odors myself, and felt the pollution in my lungs. At the same time, I have verified all this through the data. I have seen behind the curtain, so to speak, and the science confirms what lived-experience has already demonstrated: Eco-Vista's pollution is unchecked, dangerous, and only going to get worse if nothing is done. The people are in danger, and the land is crying out for help.

I don't have all the answers, and I can't say what comes next. But I am sharing this because I believe Eco-Vista is on the verge of catastrophe, and the powers that be are at best indifferent to the somber reality we know find ourselves in. But it's not too late. I have faith that the people in this room tonight will be able to see a path forward together.

Thank you.