

# FBI probing repair work at landfill; Agency has sought documents from city, interviewed staff; At issue is leaking pond; Investigation comes after key employee was fired over dispute: [FINAL Edition]

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

The identities of the employees could not be learned. Kenneth J. Strong, who was forced out of the Public Works Department, was also interviewed by the FBI, sources said. Strong refused to comment publicly. FBI officials would neither confirm nor deny whether it is investigating.

The controversy surrounding the landfill began last summer, when Strong defied orders from [George G. Balog] to return the landfill's runoff pond to use after lengthy repair work.

The dispute was the culmination of a stormy relationship between Strong and Balog. Strong, ousted Nov. 10, continues to say that returning the pond to service without a thorough investigation would be a health hazard.

## FULL TEXT

Federal investigators have opened an inquiry into the Quarantine Road Sanitary Landfill just months after a city worker was ousted from his job for publicly raising questions about potentially hazardous pollution caused by shoddy repairs at the landfill.

Several current and former employees of the Baltimore Department of Public Works have been interviewed by the FBI -- some more than once -- and subpoenas have been issued for records relating to the questionable repairs.

Sources familiar with the investigation say two high-ranking public works officials were asked to chronicle the repairs, which cost nearly twice the \$62,000 estimate.

The identities of the employees could not be learned. Kenneth J. Strong, who was forced out of the Public Works Department, was also interviewed by the FBI, sources said. Strong refused to comment publicly. FBI officials would neither confirm nor deny whether it is investigating.

"Usually in matters like this, we are asked to submit records," said George G. Balog, the public works director. "But I have been instructed by the city solicitor's office not to comment."

Otho M. Thompson, assistant city solicitor, refused to provide details about what documents federal investigators subpoenaed.

"I'm not at liberty to speak about that at this point," Thompson said yesterday.

The controversy surrounding the landfill began last summer, when Strong defied orders from Balog to return the landfill's runoff pond to use after lengthy repair work.

Strong claimed that the repairs made by contractor L. F. Mahoney Inc. of Baltimore was substandard and could result in contamination of ground water. Mahoney officials could not be reached.

State investigators found that the pond leaked and ordered city officials not to use it.

Balog claimed that the pond leaked because Strong refused to fill it. He said that its exposure to extreme summer heat -- not shoddy repair work -- caused the damage.

The runoff pond at the landfill, near Hawkins Point on the southern edge of the city, still is not completely repaired.

The dispute was the culmination of a stormy relationship between Strong and Balog. Strong, ousted Nov. 10, continues to say that returning the pond to service without a thorough investigation would be a health hazard.

Cause unknown

State investigators never determined the cause of the leaks, said Edward M. Dexter, chief of the Field Operations and Compliance Division of the state Department of the Environment.

L. F. Mahoney is continuing to do repair work.

The city also is paying Three A Hauling of Crofton to remove leachate -- the landfill's contaminated liquid runoff -- which normally would go into the runoff pond.

Uncertain cost

The cost was not immediately available because the purchase orders are bypassing the Board of Estimates, which is allowed only for expenditures of less than \$5,000.

Internal copies of purchase orders show that Three A Hauling was paid at least \$50,200 last month to remove leachate.

Those purchase orders, many bearing the same date, were for amounts just less than the \$5,000 threshold that would require Board of Estimates approval.

The landfill, which is nearing its capacity, is to close eventually.

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## DETAILS

People: Strong, Kenneth J; Balog, George G

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