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DTG is building a solid waste empire, and some say it's coming at Yakima County's expense

PHIL FEROLITO Yakima Herald-Republic
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DTG construction activity is seen beyond a fence line closing off trails at Rocky Top outside Yakima, Wash., Thursday, April 20, 2023.

Emree Weaver / Yakima Herald-Republic

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DTG Recycle — which operates a landfill on Rocky Top west of Yakima — has been building an empire in the solid waste industry.

The Snohomish County-based company bought the Anderson Landfill on Rocky Top in October 2019 and quickly increased the volume of construction waste being disposed there. Then it purchased several more solid waste collection facilities on the state's west side.

A DTG investor in December sold its equity in the company to an Australia-based investor for \$53.2 million. And in February, DTG's founder and former president, Daniel Timothy Guimont, purchased a \$38 million waterfront mansion in the exclusive Seattle suburb of Medina.

The company recently closed 160 acres it owns around the Rocky Top landfill that is home to several trails used by hikers and mountain bikers to make way for possible future landfill expansions.

Neighbors upset over the increased operations on Rocky Top say DTG is making big profits at the expense of Yakima County's environment by disposing of huge amounts of waste from outside the area.

"Neighbors are not happy that so much of this waste has come from outside of Yakima County and Canada," said Nancy Lust, who lives near the landfill.

DTG officials declined to be interviewed for this story but did issue a statement through their public relations firm, SPD&G Advertising and Public Relations in Yakima.

"DTG works within the framework of applicable regulations and works cooperatively with Yakima Health and the Department of Ecology to ensure human health and the environment are protected," the statement said.

Neighbors disagree. Their barrage of complaints about increased truck traffic, odor, nighttime work and rock blasting since DTG acquired the landfill led to regulators taking a closer look at operations and finding several environmental concerns, including an underground fire in a disposal cell.

Last fall, the state Department of Ecology deemed the landfill a toxic cleanup site.

The Yakima Health District has regulatory authority over landfill operations with technical support from Ecology.

Scott Cave, a consultant hired by neighbors, wonders whether regulators are providing adequate oversight and questions at least \$4,000 in campaign contributions from Guimont, his wife and two others with the same address to Yakima County Commissioner Amanda

McKinney in 2022.

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The contributions were reported on the state's Public Disclosure Commission website. DTG's landfill is within her commission district.

McKinney says businesses often make campaign contributions and such contributions do not influence regulations.

“I have always carried myself and will continue to carry myself to be fair and follow the law,” she said. “That’s always what I’ve expressed when we get updates from the health district.”



Inaccessible trails are seen beyond a fence at Rocky Top outside Yakima, Wash., Thursday, April 20, 2023.

Emree Weaver / Yakima Herald-Republic

Waste disposal

The limited purpose landfill at Rocky Top is permitted to accept only demolition and construction waste, though it also has permits to operate a recycling sorting facility and an adjacent gravel mine.

In 2021, DTG accepted 456,442 cubic yards of construction and demolition waste alone at its Yakima landfill, with more than half of it — 245,160 cubic yards — coming from outside Yakima County.

Of that, 164,400 cubic yards came from Canada, 76,320 cubic yards came from Snohomish County and 4,440 cubic yards from Pierce County, according to an annual report submitted to the state Department of Ecology.

In 2022, the amount of construction and demolition waste increased to 688,108 cubic yards, with a majority of it — 499,335 cubic yards — coming from areas outside Yakima County. DTG accepted 168,616 cubic yards from King County and 330,719 cubic yards from Pierce County, the annual report said.

There are no laws or county ordinances prohibiting private landfills from accepting waste from other areas.

Cave said material accepted at such facilities is supposed to be sent to other facilities that manufacture it back into usable products.

He accuses DTG of disposing of it at the Rocky Top landfill.

“The question is the regulations, the land requirements,” he said. “Are they up to date to what we’re dealing with here? I don’t think so.”

Cave has received numerous records through public disclosure requests filed with state and local authorities about DTG’s landfill. There’s little information about what the company recycles, he said.

“That’s the dirty secret in all this,” he said. “What is the follow-up to see if they really did it? — I just don’t see data for recovery. I see data for disposal.”

The reports to Ecology did say DTG recycled concrete, asphalt and land clearing debris.

Wallboard waste from new construction is typically sent to companies that repurpose it into new wallboard or fertilizer for crops. Wallboard is made of gypsum, a calcium sulfate product that helps soil in the growing process.

Acquisitions

DTG founder Guimont partnered with Toronto-based Clairvest Group in January 2020, just months after acquiring the landfill on Rocky Top, according to a DTG news release.

During the partnership, DTG had acquired 10 subsidiaries, most of them material recovery facilities in the Puget Sound area.

In December 2022, DTG announced that Clairvest had sold its equity interests in DTG to Australia-based Macquarie Asset Management, garnering \$53.2 million in proceeds, the release said.

In February, Guimont purchased his mansion in Medina. According to King County property transfer records, a North Dakota company named ELCYCER SYAP (Recycle Pays spelled backwards) purchased the mansion. The company's address in a sales document lists the company's address as the same as a Woodinville home owned by Guimont.

DTG now owns 15 subsidiaries, including the Rocky Top landfill and a recycling facility in Salem, Ore.

“Our initial vision in partnering with Clairvest was to become the largest (non-municipal solid waste) and recycling company in the greater Seattle region, and we have achieved what we set out to do,” Guimont said in the release announcing the sale.



FILE — The landfill at Rocky Top can be seen from one of the trails Saturday, Aug. 13, 2022, in Yakima, Wash.
Evan Abell / Yakima Herald-Republic, file

Environmental concerns

The Yakima Health District and Ecology continue to monitor and investigate landfill operations on Rocky Top.

In October, Ecology deemed the landfill a toxic cleanup site after finding unsafe amounts of benzene and naphthalene being emitted into the atmosphere. These are sourced from petroleum hydrocarbons, Ecology said.

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Under previous ownership, the landfill included a petroleum-contaminated soils site, where contaminated soils from filling stations and the like could be brought to decompose.

DTG officials had said the company would work with regulators on a cleanup plan.

Further air monitoring showed no immediate threat to public health, Ecology recently said.

The agencies also are looking at groundwater. A natural rock lining separating the surface from the aquifer beneath, the Vantage Interbed, had been fractured due to excavating.

Groundwater monitoring showed no contamination in area drinking water at this time, Ecology recently said.

Waste disposal has been moved to the south of that area under a temporary conditional use permit, said Shawn Magee, director of environmental health at the health district.

DTG is required to install a protective liner to keep waste from groundwater in a new cell before using it, Magee said.

The new cell is expected to be complete by late summer or early fall, he said.

~~The company is also required to move all the waste in the currently active cell to the new lined cell once it's complete, Magee said.~~

DTG also must install more groundwater monitoring wells, he said.

The groundwater table is closer to the surface than what was thought when landfill permits were renewed by the previous owner in early 2000, Magee said.

The health district and Ecology also are investigating the landfill for PFAS, a group of man-made chemicals used in a vast number of consumer and industrial products.

The Yakima Training Center once used fire retardant composed of PFAS, and brought soil possibly contaminated with it to the landfill when it was operating the petroleum-contaminated soils site, Magee said.

The health district is working with Ecology to add PFAS to groundwater and surface testing, he said.

“It’s a whole new wrinkle to this whole situation, so we are working with Ecology on that currently,” he said. “I can only assume that sample testing is going to get better very rapidly.”

Regulators are still assessing the cause, suppression and impact of an underground fire in the northern boundary of a disposal cell that was closed in March 2022, Magee said.

The fire isn’t producing emissions threatening public health at this time, he said. A landfill fire expert may be brought in to help, Magee said.

DTG’s landfill permit expires in June, at which time it must renew it to continue operating, he said.

Reach Phil Ferolito at pferolito@yakimaherald.com.
MORE INFORMATION

Public access still in doubt for Rocky Top trails

Phil Ferolito

Yakima County Government, Lower Valley Reporter

Hi, I'm Phil Ferolito, longtime reporter with the Yakima Herald-Republic, where I have gained an array of experience from covering small city governments and school districts to big-picture issues concerning county government, crime and the Yakama Nation, a federally recognized tribe with important historical and cultural ties to the land. I began with the Herald-Republic in Oct. 2000 as a copy editor, designing pages, writing headlines and proof-reading stories. Over the years I have covered four Lower Valley municipalities, Granger, Toppenish, Wapato and Harrah, and the Yakama Nation. My goal always has been to shine a light in dark places and bring readers closer to concerning issues, important people, and other events in our community.