

Pownal dump that closed in '67 left lingering issues for the town

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POWNAL — Environmental issues surrounding a former town dump site off Dean Road that closed 41 years ago have been revived as an engineering assessment is in progress to determine whether a cleanup is needed.

Barlow property

The site, part of a 400-acre tract now owned by Robert Barlow of Stamford, is the former Dean farm, which by the 1960s was owned by Joseph Sarkis. He contracted with the town to operate a dump or landfill that accepted both household and industrial wastes, according to current town officials and news articles published at the time.

Many details of the operation are murky today, but the site had a short, colorful and controversial history that was linked to the town when the Selectmen entered into a contract with Sarkis in 1960.

Barlow, who purchased the land in 1983, has operated a gravel business from the land, which distributed gravel products around the area for various municipal and private construction projects. When Barlow attempted to sell some of the acreage around the former dump site in 2005, a preliminary environmental assessment conducted by an engineer hired by the prospective buyer revealed pollution. The state has

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since ordered a more detailed assessment and will evaluate whether a cleanup is needed. A grant of \$30,000 in state brownfields money recently was awarded to help with the evaluation.

According to Banner news articles from the period, a fire broke out in the dump site on Sept. 6, 1966, and the cause was debated by Sarkis and members of the Board of Selectmen at a subsequent board meeting. Sarkis blamed the fire on "spontaneous combustion" resulting from indiscriminate mixing of wastes from local industries and household waste. The site was operated as a landfill and did not require burning of refuse.

Sarkis also blamed the Selectmen for the fire, saying the board allowed the industrial and household waste materials to be dumped together. Board members denied they had allowed the materials to be mixed, saying that signs instructed that materials be dumped at different sections of the site.

Local industries mentioned in the articles as dumping at the site include the former Pownal Tanning Co., the former Warren Wire mill (now owned by Mack Molding), and the former Green Mountain Race Track, which was enjoying its peak years as a horse racing track. Before the fire, according to the articles, Sarkis had threatened to close the site, but a court injunction obtained by the Selectmen as they looked for a new landfill. They also authorized a local contractor to perform grading work there.

According to Pownal land records, the town paid Sarkis \$125 a month to operate the dump. The agreement was reached on Nov. 20, 1960. Signing each year, Sarkis agreed "to operate and maintain a landfill for the town of Pownal."

Following the fire, residents of North Pownal clamored for closure of the operation, calling it a health hazard, and Selectmen said they would develop a proposal for a new landfill by the next annual town meeting.

Sarkis' contract with the town ended on April 1, 1967, according to a Banner article, but by then the town had leased land in East Pownal and opened a landfill there. That site is near the location of the current town transfer station and two now-closed and sealed landfill areas.

Sarkis also operated a mobile home park, called the Ponderosa Trailer Park, on his land. That was closed by health officials on in July 1970 due to the presence of contaminated water, inadequate sewage disposal and inadequate garbage collection.

Barlow purchased the land in 1983 from Harwood and Louretta Moore, who purchased the property from Sarkis in 1978.