

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Regulation and Enforcement Division



Department of

**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Our reference: DAERA/25-547

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Environmental Crime Unit
Northern Ireland Environment Agency
17 Antrim Road
LISBURN
BT28 3AL

Tel: 02890569453

Email: EnvironmentalCrime@daera-ni.gov.uk

17/10/2025

Dear [REDACTED]

Environmental Information Regulations 2004

I refer to your request for information received by the Department on 24 September 2025 that sought the following information:

Requesting details in relation to a bonfire site near Meridi Street in South Belfast – summary of actions taken relating to suspected asbestos and costs incurred.

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds all of the information you requested however some of this information will be withheld as explained below.

1. *A summary of the actions taken to address concerns over suspected asbestos material on the site (such as covering the materials, fencing, security, staffing costs etc), and the overall cost of those actions.*

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

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On 16 May 2025, NIEA was informed that asbestos waste was present at this site and has since been addressing the situation within a tight legal framework.

Asbestos is particularly dangerous when disturbed, making its professional removal, with considerations around public safety, a highly specialised, complex, delicate, and time-consuming operation. Following the notification in May 2025, NIEA determined that it was not feasible to remove the asbestos pile in its entirety before the anticipated bonfire on 11 July 2025 because there was not enough time to safely clear and secure the site for asbestos removal. It was in this context that NIEA took all practical measures that were available to mitigate the risk of asbestos fibre release from the pile and protect members of the public.

Mitigation measures included the installation of additional tarpaulin to cover the asbestos pile, which was stabilised with a 70mm layer of quarry dust serving as a fire-retardant barrier. Furthermore, Belfast City Council procured fire blankets that were placed on the pile, followed by an extra layer of quarry dust for enhanced protection. The area was secured with a double layer of Heras fencing and clearly displayed warning signage. NIEA contractors implemented a daily inspection and maintenance schedule for both the asbestos pile and its immediate surroundings.

On 9 July 2025 NIEA contractors inspected areas of the site which were accessible and removed approximately 20kg of suspected asbestos fragments outside of the main asbestos pile.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is currently concentrating on the landowner's actions to ensure the safe removal of the asbestos pile from the site.

A notice was issued to the landowner by NIEA requiring the site be remediated. This was commenced by the landowner on 4 August 2025 following an initial delay to allow for the site to be fully secured.

NIEA will maintain communication with the landowner regarding the completion of remediation.

NIEA has established a multi-agency review group in collaboration with partner organisations to assess the site and evaluate its potential impact on public health. Throughout the remediation process, NIEA has maintained ongoing engagement with these partners.

It is the intention of NIEA to carry out an independent environmental assessment of the site post remediation.

2. Available breakdown of costs incurred.

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3. *Has this cost been paid for by the public purse, or has it been recouped from the landowner?*

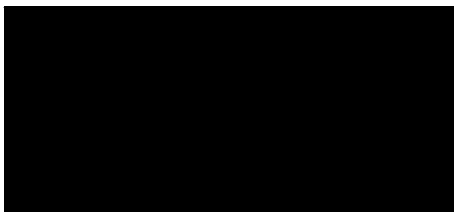
The Department has decided not to disclose the information in relation to part 2 of query 1, and queries 2 and 3 of this request as it considers Environmental Information Regulation 12 (5) (b) to be engaged. A public authority may refuse to disclose information to the extent that its disclosure would adversely affect the course of justice, in this case ongoing judicial proceedings. In these instances, the Department is legislatively required to consider the public interest in disclosure. An associated Public Interest Test has been conducted and is attached for your information at **Annex A**

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



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