

Taking risks in Lewiston

OUNCE OF PREVENTION: *Two recent incidents show town officials haven't complied with environmental regulations.*

~~SCENE~~
Now it's two Town of Lewiston department heads who've run afoul of environmental regulations. That's two too many. The town should make sure its officers know and follow the laws.

In the latest case, a state agent said last week that Water Superintendent Steve Reiter allowed dumping at an unpermitted waste disposal facility behind the Water Pollution Control Center on Fletcher Road. Reiter said he gave a local trucker the authority to dump several loads of asphalt behind the plant in September because he said he thought it could be used by the town in the future. Threatened by the state with fines of \$10,000 a day, Supervisor Thomas E. Sharp told state Environmental Conservation Officer Michael Phelps, "You have the board's promise, this will stop."

Reiter joins Highway Superintendent Milo E. Quarantillo in the ranks of the environmentally incorrect. Earlier this month, it was discovered that Quarantillo authorized the dumping of refrigerators containing Freon at the town's closed landfill on Harold Road. Quarantillo said he didn't know it was illegal to temporarily store refrigerators before the Freon had been drained. No one knows yet whether any Freon has seeped into the ground.

In both cases, action is being taken to correct the problems. But the town risked stiff fines at Fletcher Road and risked both contamination and incurring closing costs at Harold Road. Modern Landfill agreed in 1994 to spend up to \$3 million to permanently close the Harold Road landfill, but any damage to the facility since the closure wouldn't be Modern's responsibility.

The bottom line is, town officials should have known the law and abided by it. Ignorance is an inadequate defense against risk to the town's environmental and fiscal health. Lewiston must focus more on prevention to reduce the risks of pollution and the costs of enforcement.