

# Overgrown landfill a haven for ticks

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- Al Vaughters
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TONAWANDA, N.Y. (WIVB) - Neighbors who live near a landfill in the Town of Tonawanda are Calling 4 Action because they say overgrown grass and weeds at the local dump have become a breeding ground for a dangerous parasite.

Town officials concede they have seen an uptick in the number of ticks at the old landfill, but they also argue their hands are tied. Radioactive material is buried in the dump.

Neighbor in the City of Tonawanda are still questioning why the town, which has done so in the past, has stopped cutting the high grass and weeds along the fence line. Al Esposito says it has become a breeding ground for ticks.

"It is causing a severe tick problem over here. I was cutting the grass the other day, I had three ticks walking up my leg over here," he said.

Ticks can spread infection, especially deer ticks, which carry Lyme Disease. But that is not all Esposito has seen in his backyard. He recalls seeing a critter on top of his tool shed.

"I thought it was a cat on top of my shed, and it was a rat the size of a 6- or 7-month-old cat, sitting on my roof, looking down at me and my dog," he said.

Ron McEldowney has asked Town of Tonawanda officials why they aren't cutting the weeds anymore. He was told it is because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is in charge and won't allow it.

"They can't cut the grass anymore because the Corps of Engineers told them they can't cut grass anymore, because it was loaded with ticks and everything back here. Nobody is allowed to go back there at all - only the Corps of Engineers people," McEldowney said.

The town landfill was de-activated years ago after neighbors complained it was making them sick. Radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, the government's program that developed the atomic bomb, is buried there. But we spotted activity.

Esposito said, "It is so secure and so private back there, nobody knows what they are burying or what they are doing back there."

A spokesman for the Army Corps of Engineers says they are not standing in the way of the town mowing the weeds. But a town official told News 4 they want permission in writing.

In the meantime, News 4 will continue to investigate to find out what exactly is being dumped in the landfill.

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