

Police Service of Northern Ireland Declines Intervention as Asbestos Found Near Belfast Bonfire Site

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— Categories: General News



Suspected asbestos has been discovered at five additional locations surrounding a bonfire site near the Donegall Road and Westlink in south Belfast, heightening public health concerns just days before the Eleventh Night celebrations.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has already removed around 20 kilograms of asbestos-containing material, but authorities now suspect more fragments may remain scattered across the site. The bonfire's proximity to a major electricity substation has added to fears, with concerns that power to the Royal Victoria and Belfast City Hospitals could be compromised if the situation escalates.

Despite Belfast City Council's request for assistance in dismantling the bonfire, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) confirmed it would not intervene. After conducting a multi-agency risk assessment, the PSNI concluded that attempting removal posed greater dangers than allowing the bonfire to proceed under monitored conditions.

The council has expressed frustration over the decision, stating it remains "deeply concerned" about the presence of hazardous material and has written to the Environment Minister calling for urgent action to ensure the asbestos is removed without further delay.

The NIEA acknowledged it was first alerted to the matter in May but said conditions had not been safe for removal at that time. In response, the agency worked with the landowner and council to install mitigation measures, including covering the asbestos, using fire-retardant materials, and erecting extra fencing to reduce the immediate risk to the public.

The NIEA stated that the landowner has committed to overseeing the full removal of the remaining asbestos next week. However, the agency also noted that further contamination across the site remains a possibility.

Eleventh Night bonfires are a longstanding tradition in unionist communities, marking the lead-up to the Twelfth of July celebrations,

which commemorate King William III's victory over King James II in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. While culturally significant, such events have increasingly drawn criticism over safety and environmental concerns.

SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party) councillor Donal Lyons voiced disappointment at the PSNI's stance. However, many argue that a careful, community-sensitive approach is essential to balancing cultural expression with public safety and environmental responsibility.