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Cleaning up Dillo Dirt fire could cost \$9M

By: Jeff Stensland



The month-long Dillo Dirt fire that started in Southeast Travis County this past February could cost as much as \$9 million dollars to clean up.

For weeks, the massive fire at the Hornsby Bend Water Treatment Plant sent thick, dark smoke billowing into the sky.

Investigators say high winds caused a pile of compost to spontaneously combust, and the fire spread rapidly. It took crews nearly a month to extinguish the fire.

So far, Austin Water Utility has spent nearly \$3 million on an outside company to clean up what was left behind.

"When they tore the piles down and spread them out, that took up a lot more space. It's kind of impacting our ability to operate normally," Jane Burazer with Austin Water said.

Burazer says Dillo Dirt has been open to some capacity since the fire, but she expects it to take up to another two years to clear out the scattered compost.

"More the volume and how many trucks you can get onto the site and off of the site," Burazer said. "You've got a lot of logistics to consider."

Burazer expects cleanup to cost another \$6 million—part of which will explore ways to prevent future fires at the compost plant—on top of the \$3 million already spent.

"You are never going to prevent heat from happening in a compost fire," neighbor Sydney Gorton said. "Fires like that flare up in haystacks. They flare up on farms. It happens naturally."

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