



Possible expansion of landfill near Austin's airport is raising safety concerns

by Brittany Ford

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The possible expansion of a landfill near Austin's airport is raising safety concerns.

Some say the swarm of birds that hover the area have become a danger to planes flying in and out of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

As someone who frequently flies into ABIA, commercial pilot Adham Le-leffendi says the landfill has become a concern. "I would see birds on approach and departure to the south. I always kind of noticed them," he said. Mainly, he



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> LANDFILL EXPANSION PROMPTS ABIA SAFETY CONCERNS



says because of the crowd it attracts. "A few times I have gotten too close for comfort. Those turkey vultures are big - especially when they're flying by you at 150 mph."

A plan currently in the works would allow the landfill to reach even closer to the airport's landing strip.

The Travis County Landfill is estimated to be just around 3,000 feet from the ABIA runway. Environmental advocacy groups and pilots are raising concerns about its possible expansion. (CBS Austin)

Jeffery Jacoby with Texas Campaign for Environment says that will cause a hazard for air travel. "The major issue is that they're applying for an expansion that would allow this operation to build up to 13-feet from the flight path and extend the life of this landfill for 13 years," he said.

His agency is pushing the City of Austin to halt the expansion. "It's relying on its 20-year relationship with this garbage dump to prove that this expansion will not be problematic," Jacoby said.

The pending changes have been approved by the city's aviation department.

ABIA sent this statement in regard to the landfill expansion concerns:

The City of Austin does not own the land currently operated by the Landfill Operator and the Department of Aviation has no regulatory authority to approve or deny an operating permit. In completing our review through TCEQ's process, we took into account FAA guidance, the operating history of the facility, and any related bird strike history. After staff review, the Aviation Department determined that the proposed expansion does not appear to negatively impact airport operations and data does not appear to show a direct correlation between the landfill and reported AUS bird strikes. Passenger safety is Austin-Bergstrom's top priority and if this expansion indicated a threat to that, staff would have objected accordingly.

But for those in the air, they say it's something that needs to be more closely looked at.

"They threaten the two most critical phases of flight. That's really the issue unfortunately, the two phases of flight that they affected are the most critical," said Le-leffendi.