

The J-Pit in the Media

Environmental and Urban Studies Senior Thesis

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## Intro

The manner in which the news media reports on environmental issues is important because the production and reproduction of narratives, analysis of quotes, and audience engagement tactics all affect the way that readers think about and respond to critical issues (McCombs and Shaw 1972). However, many analyses of framing focus on content produced by large media networks which are more likely to hire experienced journalists and cover news items with regional and national significance (Maxwell Boykoff and Roberts 2007). This is important because local newspapers account for most of the news that is consumed by the general populace, and the constraints of advertising sales and public backlash against controversial reporting may sometimes limit editorial options to reproductions of local interests, values, and partisan politics (Armstrong et al. 2010). As this reporting bias is most paramount in the local news coverage of environmental issues, the impact of reporting trends as they evolve in a community over time needs to be better understood. This paper will examine the case study of a landfill in Gary, Indiana to assess how the frameworks used by local newspapers have changed over the chronological lifetime of this environmental issue.

The social management of landfills constitutes an interesting case study in which the welfare of society and its ability to safely manage waste is placed at odds with the welfare of the environment and the long-term problems of toxicity, water quality, and greenhouse gas emissions (Nicodemus 2004). Landfills are necessary for communities, but they involve the placement of noxious waste facilities that introduce problems of aggregate, large-scale environmental impacts (Nicodemus 2004). More specifically, its ability to manage landfills tests a community's trust in both the technology that contains, buries, and decomposes waste balanced

with the prevailing power structures that oversee such vital processes. Landfill operations as well as the fine structures and legal repercussions for substandard operations are most often discussed in highly technical language which prove difficult to understand for those without expertise. Local reporters may struggle with these complex technical issues and trust authority figures to explain and interpret environmental conditions (Sharon Dunwoody and Griffin 1993). As a community of readers subsequently comes to trust their power structures to protect public health, there are multiple value systems at stake that engage economic, aesthetic, and social welfare interests (Sharon Dunwoody and Griffin 1993). Such influences are thus produced and reproduced in news stories about landfills (Major and Atwood 2004). This study will use a case study of the J-pit in Gary, Indiana to analyze news framing by situating the landfill in the broader literature of the changing coverage of environmental issues

### **History of the J-Pit**

The J-Pit was formerly a sand mine in the Black Oak Neighborhood of Gary, Indiana (Earnshaw 2014). The pit is bordered by 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the North, Colfax Street to the East, 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue to the South and Morse Street to the West. The J-Pit falls directly opposite the Gary Landfill, part of the original sand mine, that was managed by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management after the company that owned it was fired due to mismanagement (James 1989). The landfill was forcibly closed in 1988 due to environmental violations, although it was subsequently reopened because a judge ruled that its closing represented a health hazard and hardship to the City.

After it was a sand mine, the J-Pit became an auto towing yard which became a waste dump for material trucked in from Illinois (Knightly 1989). The owner, Promoters Inc, used the property tax-free for more than 11 years and racked up a bill of \$200,000 in property taxes that

the City never collected. Promoters Inc then defaulted on the mortgage for the property so it was listed at a county tax sale in 1981. No one offered to buy the ex-sand mine at this tax sale because of the huge encumbrance of the property taxes that they would have had to pay. The law in Indiana for a defaulted mortgage is that the property must be listed at two tax sales before being given to the County, which in this case was Lake County. However, the property for no discernible reason was never listed at a second sale. Promoters Inc remained owners of the J-Pit. The J-Pit was used as an illegal dump for years during the 1980s which caused residents to complain about every hazard it caused ranging from miscellaneous papers, to smoke, to polluted ground water. The property then came into the possession of the Calumet Area Sportsman Club, who wanted to lease the property to a separate company, Waste Management Inc, in order to operate a landfill. In order to operate a landfill, one is required to possess a permit. The Calumet Area Sportsman Club argued that they did not need the permit to open the landfill in the 80s because in 1972, the previous owners of the J-Pit applied for a permit and never received an approval or a denial. This lack of action was thought to be a denial by the City Council at the time, but The Cal Area Sportsman believed that this inaction was not a denial and meant that they should be able to operate as a landfill. They filed a lawsuit against the City and state for the necessary permits. The landfill proposal faced multiple instances of blowback from Black Oak residents, who argued that they had been told by the City that the J-Pit would be converted into a sports facility after the sand mine was closed, although this never happened (Saunders 1988b; 1986). A court sided with the J-Pit owners and issued them a permit to operate the landfill in 1987, although the City vowed to appeal (Saunders 1988a). The saga over the J-Pit landfill was just beginning.

The debates and history of the J-Pit are particularly contentious. Residential homes stand within 600 feet of the J-Pit (Lavery 1990). However, given that the landfill across the street was shutting down, the City needed a new spot for a landfill, and the J-Pit location seemed to be perfect (Donal 1990). A State judge denied the landfill permit in the appeals case, arguing that the J-Pit was too close to residential neighborhoods, and citing a law that landfills must be at least a half-mile from homes (Vick 1992). The company responded by filing an appeal challenging this decision (Vick 1992). Further complicating the issue was an agreement entered into between Lake County and Waste Management Inc over the operation of the proposed landfill (Knightly 1992a). Their deal said that Lake County would assume ownership of the land and allow Waste Management Inc to operate the landfill and give the dumping tax directly to Lake County which would effectively shut the City of Gary out of any potential profits for operation of the landfill. The legal battle continued as one judge ordered that the State could not deny the permit for the landfill over the half-mile law, because the landfill was there before the homes were built so the buffer zone did not apply (Knightly 1992b). An Appellate court then gave the State the option to put off granting the permit to Waste Management Inc (Winkley and Knightly 1992). A further appellate decision again said that the landfill must comply with the half-mile distancing rule (Chamberlain 1993).

The company then looked to move the court case to the state supreme court. As this legal battle was going on, the City set up a panel to determine where the next landfill for Gary would be located, and the J-Pit was one of the six major sites to be considered (Chamberlain 1992). As they were considering where to put the landfill, the State Supreme Court upheld the half-mile law, and said that the landfill could not be put at the J-Pit (Andrews 1994). This decision did not stop Waste Management Inc from pushing for the J-Pit landfill, and they lobbied for the State to

repeal the law. Their lobbying was successful within the State house and the law was repealed, thus keeping the J-Pit in contention for the landfill (Cadou 1995). However, their efforts remained futile as the landfill ended up being located elsewhere in the County, despite the J-Pit remaining as one of the last two sites in contention for the landfill. Other counties, however, had officials who lobbied heavily – and successfully -- against the J-Pit (Tita 1996; Gibson 1995).

During the long-standing saga surrounding the J-Pit and its future, a more criminal plot was unearthed. Reports came out that three City Officials had entered into a deal with a separate competing waste management company, Mid-American Waste Management Systems Inc., through a \$31,000 bribe to deny Waste Management Inc the landfill deal and instead to accept the Mid-American landfill deal (Lazarus 1996). The Mid-American deal was reported to be much less lucrative for the City than the Waste Management J-Pit deal to the tune of a 3-million-dollar difference in payments to the City. This criminal case hinged on the testimony of one of the councilmen who pled guilty for a lesser sentence and testified against the remaining two councilmen. The Federal Court case pursued by the FBI, however, found the two other councilmen not guilty of these charges (James 1996; AP 1996).

Even after all of this furor, Waste Management Inc remained set on pursuing a permit for the J-Pit landfill. They proposed a further deal directly to the City, offering them \$140 Million to locate the landfill at the J-Pit (Marsh 1995). The City, possibly due to resident protests, ended up suing Waste Management and Lake County over their deal to operate the landfill separately from the City and to collect the back property taxes, both of which cost Gary money (Caldwell 1997). This lawsuit was settled out of court and the J-Pit land was given back to the City along with an undisclosed amount of money (Caldwell 1998). Gary's mayor promised publicly that the site would not become a landfill, and would become a recreation site instead. After this, Waste

Management Inc found itself in severe debt, and was sold to a separate waste management company. Most of their employees were fired (Holecek 1998).

The future looked bright for the J-Pit going into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The EPA awarded Gary a \$250,000 Brownfield Grant in order to redevelop the land, and the City hoped to turn it into a multi-use business with clean industrial development (AP 1996). This development was a few years from being started, but the City was relying on many public meetings in order to direct the scope of the development (Staff Writer 2001; Patterson 2001; Grimm 2005). The City then entered into a deal with a new waste management company, Beemsterboer Slag Corp (Grimm 2005). Beemsterboer would dump clean waste into the J-Pit in order to fill in the hole which would then become a recreation area using the funding from both the EPA and the dumping fees from Beemsterboer's use. Residents started complaining about illegal dumping occurring at the J-Pit by Beemsterboer (Harvey 2012). The residents alleged that the company was dumping refuse from a steel plant at the park which was not covered under the permit from the State. This led the State to launch an investigation, but it found no evidence of crime or pollution. This further led to a separate group, the Hoosier Environmental Council, to check the pollution in and around the J-Pit, although they ordered the City to inspect the site monthly (Carlson 2015; Earnshaw 2014). The HEC claimed that the levels of nitrate around the J-Pit were 34 times the maximum level for public health, and they found that the water near the J-Pit had high pH levels consistent with slaked lime – a hazardous material, along with high chemical levels of chloride iron. All of these conditions, they argued, were hazardous for animal and human health. The City and State said that they were monitoring the site and found no evidence of hazardous conditions.

The future of the J-Pit remains uncertain. The allegations of pollution and hazardous materials aside, the contract between the City and Beemsterboer has not been as lucrative as the

City intended (Carlson 2015). The City reported that they have received less than \$100,000 from the tipping fees. The City commissioned a \$33,000 feasibility study in order to determine what to do next with the J-Pit, but is still allowing Beemsterboer to dump at the J-Pit. They are unsure where they will go in the future, but they appear focused on revenue which leaves the promise of the J-Pit to become a recreational area in jeopardy. They have consented to host public forums on the plans before they are finalized, but the future remains unclear.

With competing interests from industry, the City, the national and state governments and the community, the J-pit is a good case study for analysis of competing stakeholder viewpoints and their representation in journalistic reporting. The J-pit features an issue important to a small community and so has been covered many different local newspapers

This study found important differences between coverage of this issue by national and local news, and found further differences between these news organs and the way local Gary journalists covered the J-Pit. It found that many National News theories are not represented at the local level, while most local theories are found. Most importantly, I found that the local journalists gave much more representation to local environmental groups and local citizens than was represented in coverage on the national level. The methods used in this paper to analyze critically dominant journalistic frames also show promise as valid methods of news analysis that could be replicated in more in-depth and extensive studies of local journalists covering other environmental issues. More of these studies are needed to inform our understanding of the important differences between local and national news sources, and specifically to illustrate how important local journalism is to the health of the country.

## **Literature Review**



## **Framing**

Framing, in simple terms, requires ‘connecting the mental dots for the public’ (Armstrong et al. 2010). Erving Goffman offered an important prerequisite to contemporary research on discourse and frames when he explained the interactions between individuals and their environments (Goffman, n.d.). Goffman describes frames as a “schemata of interpretation.” William Gamson and Andre Modigliani together refined this definition to consider framing as a device that “organizes central ideas on an issue” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). In journalism, specifically, one of the more widely accepted definitions of framing originates with Gaye Tuchman, who argues that a frame “implies identifying some items as facts, not others” (Tuchman 1976). Tuchman argues that framing should be “an ongoing process by which ideological interpretive mechanisms are derived from competing stakeholder positions. These selectively representative frames are manifest in the choice and range of terms that provide the context in which issues are interpreted and discussed” Within this definition, stakeholder is defined as individuals or groups that “stand to win or lose as a result of a policy decision” (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2008). These stakeholders become “claimsmakers” who can then articulate their perspective. This is a powerful position in that claims made either explicitly or implicitly about the issues motivate community actions (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2008). Different frames, however, can be used by different people or groups on opposing sides of an issue. (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). A frame is a method of interpretation, and so can include pro-, anti- and neutral arguments. Stakeholders push for certain ways of framing issues because they believe them to be more advantageous to their cause (Armstrong et al. 2010). By acknowledging the political influences that give rise to competing frameworks, this work underscores the importance of understanding the methods of interpretation which influence

environmental reporting. Though other reporting beats must also balance a multiplicity of perspectives, environmental news is often polarized between activist and industry interests that seek to influence public policy and community decisions through scientific claims about public health, economic vulnerability, and the fragility of natural resources.

Journalistic framing has been analyzed in many different ways. In the early 90s, most of the research done on framing used extremely subjective analysis techniques which often included researchers making subjective evaluations of the framework of a specific article (Davis 1995; Entman 1991; Fine 1992; Hornig 1992). However, for framing to continue to be an academic research topic, researchers sought a replicable and more rigorous method of analysis (Miller 1997). An example of this technique was pioneered by Miller, who used a software, VBPro, to aid in choosing words for analysis. Miller identified specific words that would be indicative of different stakeholder frames, and then used the software to analyze articles for the presence of these words in order to categorize the framing used in the articles. This method is generally accepted and has been used since in many different news framing analyses (Armstrong et al. 2010). It provides a reproducible and rigorous method of analyzing the framing of an issue over time and it allows evaluation of the impact of competing stakeholders.

### **Local Media**

Local newspapers are generally defined in the literature as newspapers with a readership of less than 50,000 (Radcliffe and Ali 2017). Most of the research on environmental coverage has focused on large market newspapers. However, small-town publications form the vast majority of newspapers in the country and account for 6,851 out of the 7,071 newspapers regularly published in the United States (Radcliffe, Ali, and Donald 2017). While the vast majority of research on framing in environmental journalism focuses on large-market papers,

small-town newspapers also have an important impact on public perceptions of environmental problems.

Both large and small newspapers perform a watchdog role which protects the public against those in power (Herbert Gans 2004; Barnett 2009). In the realm of local issues, however, small-market newspapers perform a more direct role in encouraging action, through stimulating and enabling local political participation (MCLEOD et al. 2016). Small-market newspapers also perform the function of connecting global events and local conversations (Hess n.d.; Ewart, n.d.). While national newspapers hold public authorities and private corporations accountable for their actions, small-market newspapers modify this role because of the differing expectations of local communities (Poindexter, Heider, and McCombs 2006; Barnett 2009). Segments of local communities are more interested in newspapers being a ‘good neighbor’ rather than a watchdog and prefer reporting that highlights solutions and community-building rather than focusing on attacking those in power (Radcliffe and Ali 2017). These differences from larger news stations’ coverage will be explored in the research in this study, which focuses on the differences in the evolution of environmental coverage between small market and large market newspapers.

### **Coverage of the Environment**

The public learns a lot about science from mass media (Wilson 1995). In the 1990s, climate science became increasingly politicized in the media (Trumbo 1996; M. Boykoff and Boykoff 2004). Government officials became the most cited sources on climate change in national newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Officials used specific scientists that disputed the anthropogenic sources of climate change in order to give the impression of disagreement in the scientific community, and this resulted in climate change becoming a more divisive issue in the media (Gelbspan 1998; Leggett 2001; Wilkins 1993;

McCright and Dunlap 2003; M. Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Carvalho 2005). This becomes effective for those trying to influence the framing of the issue through government officials as journalists rely heavily on those they consider authority figure such as government officials, and rarely cite other sources (Bennett 2002). Reporting on climate change is difficult because climate change is a long-term problem with variable local impacts that span multiple ecological and atmospheric systems. Gans reported that this specific challenge results in journalists sidelining content by neglecting large-scale debates that have been previously reported. Instead, reporters favor new crises such as dramatic environmental or economic impacts including sudden deaths, accidents or large disasters (H. Gans 1979). Stocking and Leonard believe that this practice of sidelining old content allows many persistent, local problems to lose their prominence in favor of coverage of impacts to far-away but exotic places (Stocking and Leonard 1990). Wilson found that the causes and consequences of climate change and environmental issues are rarely reported, as environmental risks tend to be long term and chronic, which he argues falls outside the definition of news (Wilson 2000). He argues that the definition of news are events that are ‘pertinent here and now. Coverage of climate change is further confounded when many stories are covered in an episodic nature that focuses on the news peg and not in a ‘thematic framing’ which would use the news element to tell a larger story by relating emissions, land use, consumption, and growth decisions to climate trajectories (Iyengar 1991; M. Boykoff and Boykoff 2004). Framing stories in an episodic nature leads to a shallow understanding of the issue and may merely present a scientific or economic finding in the context of a dissenting ‘outside expert’ opinion (Iyengar 1991; M. Boykoff and Boykoff 2007). In this case, reporters show balance by framing the news element as contentious so that both scientists who agree and those who disagree with the premise of climate change are given ‘equal attention’ (S. Dunwoody

and Peters 1992). Some studies have attributed this to a pursuit of objectivity (Cunningham 2003). However, reporting that compares methods and relates human action to environmental outcomes requires more sophisticated analysis and is more difficult to achieve in the polarized reporting model. Such writing is particularly challenging for a local paper that may assign one reporter to science, environment, and technology. In contrast, larger papers may have designated reporters assigned to climate change as a primary beat.

These theories of climate change are relevant to specific environmental issues. Climate change coverage often includes the representation of environmental risk, which is ‘the possibility of damage’ (Carter, Allan, and Adam 2000). These stories involve the ‘disruption of normalcy’ brought about by some catastrophe whose impact occurs on a longer time-line than that represented by more specific, short-term environmental issues. There are important differences in the scale of general climate change reporting and specific environmental problems like those represented by landfills, but they face similar issues and use similar frames because of the convoluted way future risks are presented and discussed. This connection makes theories of specific climate change coverage relevant to the discussion of specific environmental issues.

### **Data**

I chose a sample of 94 articles in order to analyze their framework and date for the purposes of this study. I found these articles from the database Access World News. I used this database because it was available with a university subscription and presented an easy way to sort articles based on date, and to restrict search parameters to certain geographic areas. The articles returned by the database search came from two different newspapers and spanned over three decades. Sixty-three articles came from the *Post-Tribune of Northwestern Indiana* and 31 articles came from the *Times Northwest Indiana*. These newspapers are locally published in or

near Gary and had reason to report on the J-Pit as part of their standard coverage of local issues. All three of these newspapers would be described as ‘small market newspapers’ which means they had a readership of under 50,000 (Radcliffe and Ali 2017). The *Post-Tribune* had a circulation of just over 50,000 in 2009 and the *Times* had a circulation of around 80,000 after increasing circulation rapidly in the 2000’s (Staff 2009). While these numbers both exceed the 50,000 cut off, both of these papers address local news and could easily be classified as local small-market papers, especially when compared to papers just over the Indiana border like the *Chicago Sun-Times* that report circulations of upwards of 275,000 (Staff 2009). This data set offers the chronological span and local focus needed to trace and analyze the trends of local newspaper environmental coverage over time. However, it is also important that frames can be compared between the types of newspapers examined.

Articles averaged about 500-600 words each. They were informational articles typically focused on the different legal and governmental processes that were affecting the J-Pit. The first article I examined was from 1986 and the last article was from 2018. Most of the articles were written in the 1990’s with over 600 results being returned using the search terms of “‘J-Pit’ + Gary” and restricting the search area to Indiana. On each side of the 90’s, there were 17 articles from 1980-89 and 16 from 2000-2020. I pulled all 33 of these articles written outside of the 1990’s and then selected 60 articles at random from the 1990’s. This would allow me to include representation from all four decades in question in my analysis. I did not have the time to analyze all the articles written about the J-Pit during the 1990s, but this is a potentially rich area for further research in a more in-depth, extensive study. Pulling 60 or about 10% of the articles from this decade does allow for a representative sample of the frameworks that would have been

prevalent during the 1990s. I excluded all articles that were editorials and instead focused on the regular news articles.

I chose to focus on coverage of the J-Pit as it developed into a Brownfield area and then transformed into a landfill despite intense opposition from local neighborhood residents. As toxic waste and waste disposal issues are frequently covered by national news outlets, this focus allows for the application of theories of environmental journalism that have been developed at the national news level. However, as the J-pit was primarily a local-interest story, exclusive coverage by small-market newspapers can also be interpreted according to theories of local news.

Seeing how the frameworks of the articles focused on this local environmental issue change over time allows these theories to be put up to the test in a slightly different environment and see how they are accurate or inaccurate. Based on the local and national news theories, we would expect to see several things. We would expect an increase in articles during the 1990s, a switch to more national and local governmental frameworks in the 90s, a focus in the articles on solutions rather than attacking local officials and frameworks used from the perspective of local environmental advocacy groups and frames that showcase the ‘good neighbor’ role, and allowed me to recognize a jump in industry frameworks after the 1990s. Also, of note are theories of how an issue is covered in its lifetime, which suggest we would expect to see fewer and fewer articles about the J-Pit as the issue dragged on and the news became what scholars call “fatigued.”

### **Methodology**

To perform this study several steps were taken. First the stakeholder texts were selected and parsed for their word counts in order to form four separate frameworks. Then the articles to

be studied were pulled from access world news and parsed for their word counts. Then the articles were compared to these frameworks through a formula before being read carefully to ensure accuracy, and a framework determination was made. This will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs. For the rest of this section, in the interest of clarity, when I refer to ‘articles’ I mean specifically the articles about the J-Pit selected for analysis, and when I refer to ‘stakeholder texts’ I mean specifically the texts chosen as constituting the frameworks characterizing the four competing stakeholder positions.

### **Determining Frameworks from Stakeholder Texts**

I had to determine which “stakeholder frameworks” through which I could best analyze the J-Pit articles. To reiterate, I defined the frameworks of the article to correspond with the process by which interpretive mechanisms were derived from competing stakeholder positions (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2008). I identified the main frameworks for my analysis as “Local Environmental Advocacy,” “Local Government,” “Industry,” and “National Government.” I selected these frameworks based on how each resonated with the thinking and perspective of competing stakeholders. Each of these names is based on specific stakeholder texts I used to help me identify and define each framework type.

I found the stakeholder texts first by using the website PR Newswire, which is a database housing press releases from many different companies. I was also able to use google to search for many of the stakeholder texts as PR Newswire was mostly used from the perspective of the Industry Framework, while the other three required further work on google to identify and elaborate. The table of the stakeholder texts used along with the search terms used is included in the appendix.



I then analyzed each stakeholder text by counting each word used in the text and sorting them by usage. I used the online tool Design215 in order to count each word in the text and then was able to sort these words through excel. I eliminated common words such as ‘a’ or ‘the’ and settled on words that were important, excluding prepositions or filler words. I made sure to combine different variations of a single word in my search, for example each count of the word’s ‘environment’, ‘environments’, or ‘environmental’ was counted together under one count. I have included a table of the words I found constitutive of each framework, sorted by order of usage and assigned a number out of 100 corresponding to how often the word was used relative to the other words in framework.

Framework word counts	Industry	Local Environmental Advocacy	Local Government	National Government
	Waste - 29	Landfill – 21	Landfill – 28	Site -16
	Services – 12	Site – 20	Public – 14	Landfill – 14
	Forward – 10	Environment – 13	Waste – 12	Facility – 11
	Looking – 8	Waste – 7	Site – 10	Area – 11
	Solid – 8	City – 7	Order – 7	Waste – 11
	Statements – 8	Odor – 7	Surface – 7	Industrial – 8
	Connections – 7	Superfund – 7	Increase – 6	Redevelopment – 8
	Management – 7	State – 6	Soil – 6	Cleanup -8
	Information – 6	Water – 6	City -5	Environment – 8

	Company - 5	River - 6	Community - 5	City - 5
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I was able to analyze the articles based on each competing stakeholder framework through a formula in excel. I ranked each word that was included in the stakeholder texts through examining its prevalence in the stakeholder texts as shown in the above table. For example, ‘waste’ and ‘landfill’ are both the number one words of the Industry and Local Environmental Advocacy points of view. ‘Waste’ was used over twice as much in the Industry stakeholder texts vs. the second most prominent word ‘service(s)’. However, in the Local Environmental Advocacy point of view, ‘landfill’ and ‘site’ were used at nearly the same frequency with less than 1% difference in usage. Because of this variance, I believed it was necessary to assign certain weightings that were based on a percentage of total use, rather than simply relying on a ranking system of 1-10. This also helps differentiate the different frameworks from each other, despite the fact that sometimes similar words are used by competing frameworks. To do this, I added up how many times the 10 chosen words were used in the stakeholder texts and divided each by this number in order to derive a representative amount of weight carried by each word. I then multiplied these percentages by 100 in order to ensure I was working with whole numbers, which I believed would make the process easier. This resulted in assigning numbers out of 100 based on their representative weighting within each framework. For example, in the industry framework, ‘waste’ formed 2.3% of the total words in the stakeholder text, ‘services’ formed 1.0% of the total words in the stakeholder texts, and ‘forward’ formed 0.7% of the total words in the stakeholder texts. Adding the 10-word percentages together gave me a total of 7.8% for all 10 words. Dividing the 2.3% that waste was used over the 7.8% total gave me 0.294 which multiplied by 100 gave me 29.4 which rounded to ranking waste at 29. I did this process for all

four frameworks to get my rankings. Once this process was complete, I could move into a discursive analysis of the articles about the J-Pit.

### **Determining Frameworks of J-Pit Articles**

I analyzed over 100 articles that had the J-Pit as their main focus for this study. To search for appropriate articles the search terms used were “J-Pit”, “J-Pit, Gary” and “Landfill, Gary.” These terms enabled me to locate specific articles related to the J-Pit. The first use of the word ‘J-Pit’ I found occurred in an article from 1988, so the search term landfill was used to search for articles from the 1980’s, but the search term ‘J-Pit’ was more appropriate to sourcing articles from the 1990s and onwards. After searching, all relevant articles that came from small market newspapers were taken from the database and sorted by date.

I sorted the articles into three ranges of dates – 1980-89, 1990-99 and finally 2000-2019. I was able to pull 17 articles from 1980-89, 600 articles from 1990-99 and 16 articles from 2000-2019. I analyzed all the articles pulled from 1980-89 and 2000-2019, but decided to analyze only a portion of the articles written during the 90s because of the large number of articles written during this period. To analyze these articles randomly, I sorted the articles by date and then used a random number generator to pick two articles on each page of search results that included 20 articles to ensure an accurate representation of the whole decade which resulted in analyzing 62 articles from this period.

I ran the articles through the same software – Design215 – that I used for the stakeholder texts in order to pull the number of words used in the articles and the amount of times each word was used. Then I constructed a formula in excel in order to count the number of times each framework word was used in the article, and then multiplied this count by the weighted value of

the framework words that I constructed previously. This generated whole numbers for each article that I could use to help determine what frameworks were most used in an article. This was used in order to determine the frequency with which specific stakeholder frameworks were followed, but to fully analyze the frameworks of articles requires analyzing both the frequency of use and the cluster of use including some subjective analysis of the article (Miller 1997). After using the formula described before to see the predominant framework of each article, I read each article and made a final determination as to its dominant framework. For example, the article *The People are Getting Dumped on* received the highest score of 258 for Local Government followed by a score of 214 for Local Environmental Advocacy when analyzed solely through the quantitative method. However, this article criticizes the landfill operators for their improper management of the landfill and makes references to the incompetence of city officials. Because of this I made the choice to categorize this article under the Local Environmental Advocacy point of view instead of the Local Government view as determined by the quantitative analysis alone. This qualitative analysis was necessary to augment the quantitative analysis and I argue that my multi-method approach enhanced the validity of my results. My method for analyzing the word choice in each paper suffers from the fault that it is simply analyzing word choice and not necessarily phrases or intended use. There is a lack of a usable software that would allow me to identify specifically the “intended” use of words. Therefore, it was necessary to individually look at each article in order to ascertain the intended effect of the keywords. Doing this may not increase the reliability of the results, but it is indicated by the limitations of the research method, and increasing the validity of the results. Based on this combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, I was able to determine a dominant framework for each article, and I have sorted them based on this dominant framework.

## Results

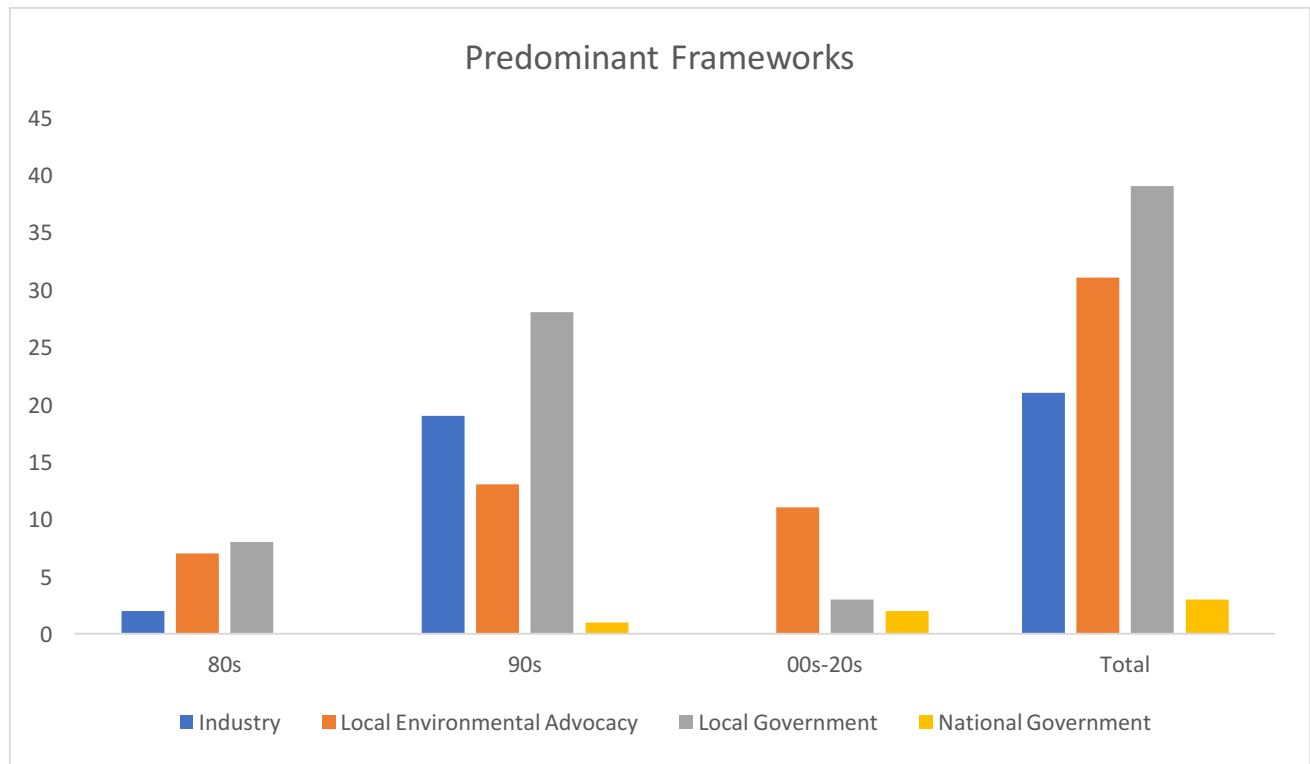
The following graph shows the coverage of the articles over time. It shows a massive increase in coverage during the 90's, followed by a slow trail-off during the early and then late 2000's.

Decade Range	1980-89	1990-99	2000-20
Articles Found	17	60	17

The following is a table that shows the framework which, to repeat, is the process by which interpretive mechanisms are derived from competing stakeholder positions of this issue, was predominantly Local Government spanning all four decades (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2008).

Predominant Framework	1980-89	1990-99	2000-20	Total
Overtime				
Industry	2	19	0	21
Local Environmental Advocacy	7	13	11	31
Local Government	8	28	3	39
National Government	0	1	2	3

The following bar graph represents the percentage of articles in each decade that correlated with a specific framework:



It is clear that as time went on, the most dominant frame was the Local Government Frame. The Industry frame was used during the 80s and 90s, but not at all after the turn of the century. The Local Environmental Advocacy frame remained constant through all the decades examined. The National Government frame was barely represented, as I found just one instance of this frame in the 90s, and just two in the decades following.

We would expect several things based on the scholarly literature which combines theories of national environmental coverage with the examination of local news coverage by Radcliffe and Ali (2017). First we would expect an increase in coverage during the 90s, and we would also expect that over time more news articles would exhibit a governmental framework showing an increasing reliance on focus on the government (Trumbo 1996; Wilkins 1993). We would in addition expect that over time, even with new events continually occurring in the saga of the J-

Pit, there would be a decrease in articles relating to it as time goes on due to journalistic fatigue. Finally, we would expect there to be some local environmental advocacy frameworks highlighting the role of the newspaper in engaging direct action along with a focus on solutions in the articles to show the ‘good neighbor’ role (Radcliffe and Ali 2017).

In analyzing the articles selected, I found a clear uptick in news coverage during the 90’s. I found strong local environment frames that remained consistent throughout all the decades reflecting the ‘good neighbor’ role, with local newspapers often interviewing residents and highlighting and reflecting their opinions. I didn’t find a strong reflection in the data of the news media reliance on governmental sources increasing over time. What I found was a constant level of local government frameworks reflected throughout the decades of my analysis. Almost all of the quotes and sources used were from government or industry officials. I found that over time, the number of articles about the J-Pit, after peaking in the 90’s, did start to decrease substantially. Even though there were increasing developments, there were fewer articles related to these developments over time.

In analyzing the articles, I found that no one ever mentioned prominent landfills like Love Canal or related that to why perhaps more residents were expressing interest in the landfill. There also was no mention of national media, or attempts to situate the J-Pit issue in the broader currents of environmentalism coursing through the country. The media kept the issue very local and didn’t make any broader national connections.

### **Discussion**

In this paper I have focused on the local environmental journalistic coverage of the J-Pit issue in Gary, Indiana. I analyzed the framework of local coverage of the J-Pit, and illustrated

how it has changed over time. To see how local compared with national coverage, I divided the results into a simple timeline ranging from the beginning of my analysis in 1980 to the end in 2019. I also identified and defined journalistic “frameworks,” which are the processes by which interpretive mechanisms are derived from competing stakeholder positions and which are used to make sense of events in journalism over the decades during which this incident was covered (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2008).

The timeline of the articles over time indicated a clear increase in coverage in the 90s. This connects directly with the uptick overall in the national coverage of environmental issues in the 90’s reported by Trumbo (Trumbo 1996). However, there are mitigating factors for this uptick besides a simple increase of interest in environmental issues. There were many different issues that occurred in the U.S., in Indiana, and in Gary in the 90s that were relevant to the issue I have chosen to examine. Most notably there was the search for a new landfill throughout Gary, the bribery charges against the Gary congressmen, and finally the transfer of ownership of the landfill away from Waste Management Co. and back to the City. These events justify the intense news focus given to the landfill in the 90’s, but do not display the whole story. After the 90s, questions still remain as to what to do with the J-Pit. A hope that it might become a city park was shown by the city officials. Following this were allegations of mismanagement in the contract with Beemsterboer Slag Co, and allegations of illegal dumping. Even in the face of these new events, more recent journalistic coverage remains very quiet about the J-Pit, with nowhere near the intense coverage given to the landfill in the 80s and 90s. The lack of coverage of these issues points towards the news fatigue which occurred over time. It seems that because of the intense coverage of the issue in the 90s and the incompetence on display by officials, the news seems ready to gloss over these events and declare an end to the J-Pit saga, whereas now more than



ever the pit is being used as a landfill through a poorly thought-out deal entered into by the City and another corporation.

The differences in the way this news has been framed over time was the main focus of this paper. How journalistic frameworks manifested and changed illuminated the broader theoretical issue of how local news differs from the national news. The first point at issue is that the framework of the articles illustrated a clear, steady presence of the local government framework over time. Local Government officials were one of the most cited sources of the articles. This is consistent with national news coverage, but the national news theories state that there was a distinct increase in the citing of government officials, which became particularly salient in the 90s (Wilkins 1993). Rather than seeing a steep increase in government officials being cited on environmental issues during the 90s, the articles in the 80s showed that this was not a new phenomenon in the coverage of the J-Pit. Additionally, national news coverage often cited national governmental officials, while the J-Pit articles rarely even quoted the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. This is also evident from the extreme lack of the National Government framework throughout each decade.

It can also be said that the local news seems to follow from what Radcliffe and Ali report as one of the main elements of local news coverage which is the ability of local news sources to stimulate direct action (Radcliffe and Ali 2017). This is evident from the frameworks that appear to have a sizable amount of local environmental advocacy viewpoints represented. This was the second most popular framework over time and also illustrates one of the main differences between national and local news coverage. Local citizens were often cited and used as sources. The local news tended to focus on times during which the community was engaged with the issues, such as town-hall meetings and gave them a voice in the J-Pit saga. This voice, whether

or not helped by the news, helped to stall and prevent the J-Pit from being selected as the next landfill by the search committee. Whether or not this will prevent the J-Pit from ever becoming a landfill remains to be seen. This type of news coverage helps show the ‘good neighbor’ discussed by Radcliffe and Ali (Radcliffe and Ali 2017). In the theory of the ‘good neighbor,’ local newspapers are expected to focus more on *solutions* to problems, along with the project of helping to build community. Although the articles did not focus on many solutions, they nevertheless follow the good neighbor theory in terms of how often they focus on local environment advocacy and highlight the opinions of citizens in an attempt to build community. Local news often focused on how the Black Oak neighborhood citizens came together in order to oppose the development of the J-Pit into a landfill.

Finally, the dominant frameworks during the 90’s illuminated the ways in which the causes of the J-Pit were situated – or were not situated -- within a broader national context of environmental struggles. The dominant framework was the local government frame, illustrating partly that the issue was not being situated in a broader context, and also illustrating the reliance of the news on governmental figures which has been previously discussed. The articles in the 2000’s were the only ones to situate the J-Pit within a broader, thematic national context. These articles talked about the degradation in general of the Indiana shores and the communities here. They also were able to situate the J-Pit in the context of its broad history. They talked about the decades of broken promises to those inhabiting the Black Oak neighborhood. These cultural connotations were not represented in the articles from the 90s. This is most likely due to the lack of sustained in-depth coverage of the issue. When the issue was covered more prominently in the 90s, there appeared to be an expectation from most of the journalists that readers would be aware of the ongoing issue and so they rarely had to speak of the history. When the issue was later

brought up much more rarely in the 2000s, there wasn't this expectation which led to a need from the journalists to then report on it offering in depth explanations of the history of the landfill. Despite this situation, there was rarely if ever a connection made between this local issue and the national issues concerning landfills.

Of note is the rarity of the industry framework. This framework was used in the 90s, but rarely in the 80s or after the 90s. The increase in this framework in the 90s could have occurred because of an increase in lobbying that occurred with the increase in industries desire to politicize climate change. There was not much of the 'dueling scientists' represented in these articles which acknowledged landfills as harmful to the community. However, the articles did note the necessity of the landfills for a city the size of Gary and noted how much trash was produced by citizens in the city. They also discussed the landfills potential benefit to the city because of their money generating capability.

Analyzing specific local environmental journalism coverage has revealed some important similarities and differences when compared with national coverage. It shows that as it applies to environmental journalism, local coverage seems to follow the 'good neighbor' effect, along with illustrating the ways local coverage did inspire direct action. Both of these functions were documented by Ali, and they were both represented in the coverage of the J-Pit. This study found also that local environmental journalism did not fully follow the progression of changes that national environmental journalism followed including an increase in the reliance on governmental sources as they were doing this before the 90's and also using sources from local residents and the local environmental advocacy framework at a much higher rate than would be expected in National News Coverage. The J-Pit did follow the increase in coverage in the 90s and the tendency to report on news in episodic fashion. Another finding was the way that the

local newspapers situated the issue, only deciding to talk about broader context when the issue had been out of prominence for some time. Perhaps the most important finding, was the way that the local stories amplified the voice of local residents and community activists. These findings show that the theories of national coverage of environmental issues were somewhat correct in their analysis of these changes and two of these changes were represented in the issue of the J-Pit by local newspapers. The local journalism coverage proved to have much more in common with the national changes in journalism, but had the important differences that Radcliffe and Ali documented. This suggests that several of the theories that Radcliffe and Ali had about the differences between local and national journalism were applicable in this context. These differences in coverage are extremely important to explore further and perhaps show that importance of local news sources and the need to protect them because of the valuable function they provide of building communities and giving voice to local residents in a way that is not seen in National News Coverage.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I identified the predominant frameworks -- the process by which interpretive mechanisms are derived from competing stakeholder positions -- that were used in the local environmental coverage of the J-Pit, and how these predominant frameworks changed over time in local papers (Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2008). I then compared these frameworks as they existed in local papers to the literature on how national environmental journalism has changed over time in their coverage of environmental issues along with theories of the special services that local journalism fulfills. My findings showed that the special function of local journalism was represented in the coverage of the J-Pit. They also showed that the theories of national

journalistic coverage of environmental issues were somewhat correct in the episodic nature of news, and in the increase in coverage in the 90s, but not the increasing reliance on governmental sources.

The conclusions of this study can be hamstrung by a few issues. There is a limit to the reliability of these conclusions because of the focus on both one environmental issue and only one researcher looking at the findings. However, these conclusions do have validity in terms of how the predominant frameworks in news articles can illustrate truths about how news is covered and is worthy of discussion. Applying these methods to different issues in broader studies with more researchers would enhance the reliability of the results and form a more complete view of how local journalists cover environmental issues in their communities. Still, these results have shed light onto how these specific local journalists in Gary are responding to environmental problems in their communities and how they choose to cover them. It has shown that these journalists focus more on the communities being impacted and giving more voice to these communities.

The inclusion of local news coverage in our knowledge of environmental journalism is an extremely important facet of our understanding of climate change. As Radcliffe, Ali, and Donald note, local newspapers account for 6,851 out of the 7,071 newspapers regularly published in the United States, and so form an important source of information to many Americans (Radcliffe, Ali, and Donald 2017). Represented in this study was the fact that these local papers give much more of a voice to local citizens and local environmental groups that advocate for their communities than is present in national news. More in-depth studies of small-market papers are needed in order to confirm what was indicated in this small study. Especially as small market newspapers are shrinking, and their newsrooms replaced by larger news networks, we could lose

this valuable voice that highlights local issues and keeps people informed about their specific community (Radcliffe, Ali, and Donald 2017).

Research into how local newspapers cover issues needs to be expanded. As already demonstrated, local news organs perform an important service regarding information dispersion for issues important to many Americans. In this case, there were clearly demonstrated differences between local coverage and national coverage of issues. If local newspaper coverage on environmental issues is expanded, then more insight into how the public reacts can be gleaned. Hopefully expanded local coverage would show how climate change is already affecting small communities and raise the knowledge level and awareness of these issue in many communities, giving rise to concern and activism on a broad scale.

**Appendix**  
**Stakeholder Text Table**

viewpoint	Press-Williams 32	Terms
industry	<a href="https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/advanced-disposal-announces-entry-into-new-indiana-market-through-acquisition-of-cgs-services-300401797.html">https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/advanced-disposal-announces-entry-into-new-indiana-market-through-acquisition-of-cgs-services-300401797.html</a> <a href="https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/vls-recovery-a-portfolio-company-of-aurora-capital-partners-expands-into-marine-services-with-acquisition-of-tubal-cain-services-300878482.html">https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/vls-recovery-a-portfolio-company-of-aurora-capital-partners-expands-into-marine-services-with-acquisition-of-tubal-cain-services-300878482.html</a> <a href="https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/waste-connections-announces-recently-completed-acquisition-activity-and-upcoming-management-presentations-300976332.html">https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/waste-connections-announces-recently-completed-acquisition-activity-and-upcoming-management-presentations-300976332.html</a> <a href="https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/waste-connections-releases-2019-sustainability-report-300947672.html">https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/waste-connections-releases-2019-sustainability-report-300947672.html</a> <a href="https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/financial-close-achieved-on-newhurst-energy-from-waste-facility-301002750.html">https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/financial-close-achieved-on-newhurst-energy-from-waste-facility-301002750.html</a> <a href="https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/gfl-to-acquire-county-waste-of-virginia-889012047.html">https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/gfl-to-acquire-county-waste-of-virginia-889012047.html</a> <a href="https://www.meridianwaste.com/media/87310/press-release-meridian-waste-acquires-two-landfills-in-knoxville-final.pdf">https://www.meridianwaste.com/media/87310/press-release-meridian-waste-acquires-two-landfills-in-knoxville-final.pdf</a> <a href="https://swana.org/Membership/TechnicalDivisions/LandfillManagement.aspx">https://swana.org/Membership/TechnicalDivisions/LandfillManagement.aspx</a>	'landfill
local environmental advocacy	<a href="https://www.hecweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HEC-Assessment-of-EJ-Needs-in-Northern-Lake-County-Communities-FINAL-REPORT2.pdf">https://www.hecweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HEC-Assessment-of-EJ-Needs-in-Northern-Lake-County-Communities-FINAL-REPORT2.pdf</a> <a href="https://www.hecweb.org/issues/environmental-health-justice/environmental-justice/">https://www.hecweb.org/issues/environmental-health-justice/environmental-justice/</a> <a href="https://toxicsaction.org/press-release-elected-officials-environmental-groups-citizens-speak-wheelabrator-proposal-expand-saugus-ash-landfill/">https://toxicsaction.org/press-release-elected-officials-environmental-groups-citizens-speak-wheelabrator-proposal-expand-saugus-ash-landfill/</a> <a href="https://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2018/02/advocates-call-for-springfield-s-toxic-coal-ash-landfill-closure">https://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2018/02/advocates-call-for-springfield-s-toxic-coal-ash-landfill-closure</a>	'landfill 'landfill advocac



	<a href="https://ipen.org/news/press-release-environmental-advocates-buck-trash-incineration-back-waste-prevention">https://ipen.org/news/press-release-environmental-advocates-buck-trash-incineration-back-waste-prevention</a> <a href="https://my.lwv.org/delaware/new-castle-county/action-alert/protect-our-water-oppose-minquadale-landfill-expansion">https://my.lwv.org/delaware/new-castle-county/action-alert/protect-our-water-oppose-minquadale-landfill-expansion</a> <a href="https://www.archcitydefenders.org/statement-on-the-dismissal-of-west-lake-landfill-protesters-charges/">https://www.archcitydefenders.org/statement-on-the-dismissal-of-west-lake-landfill-protesters-charges/</a> <a href="https://vtdigger.org/2019/05/06/landfill-owner-blames-odor-complaint-spike-tactics-expansion-opponents/">https://vtdigger.org/2019/05/06/landfill-owner-blames-odor-complaint-spike-tactics-expansion-opponents/</a> <a href="https://www.indianaenvironmentalreporter.org/posts/nearly-half-of-indiana-superfund-sites-threatened-by-climate-change-effects">https://www.indianaenvironmentalreporter.org/posts/nearly-half-of-indiana-superfund-sites-threatened-by-climate-change-effects</a>	
ocal overnment	<a href="https://garyin.us/environmental-affairs/">https://garyin.us/environmental-affairs/</a> <a href="https://sfpublicworks.org/project/press-release-hearings-begin-week-recologys-refuse-rate-increase-plan-3717">https://sfpublicworks.org/project/press-release-hearings-begin-week-recologys-refuse-rate-increase-plan-3717</a> <a href="https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/pressroom/2014_01/20140131.html">https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/pressroom/2014_01/20140131.html</a> <a href="https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/112383.html">https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/112383.html</a> <a href="https://www.in.gov/idem/cleanups/2355.htm">https://www.in.gov/idem/cleanups/2355.htm</a>	'landfill
ational overnment	<a href="https://archive.epa.gov/epa/aboutepa/love-canal-tragedy.html">https://archive.epa.gov/epa/aboutepa/love-canal-tragedy.html</a> <a href="https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/report-sbarpanel-landfills.pdf">https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/report-sbarpanel-landfills.pdf</a>	'landfill

<p><a href="https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/reference-news-release-epa-reaches-legal-agreement-improve-operations-mocas-landfill">https://www.epa.gov/enforcement/reference-news-release-epa-reaches-legal-agreement-improve-operations-mocas-landfill</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.epa.gov/hwcorrectiveactionsites/hazardous-waste-cleanup-dupont-facility-east-chicago-indiana">https://www.epa.gov/hwcorrectiveactionsites/hazardous-waste-cleanup-dupont-facility-east-chicago-indiana</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.epa.gov/uss-lead-superfund-site">https://www.epa.gov/uss-lead-superfund-site</a></p> <p><a href="https://cfpub.epa.gov/bf_factsheets/gfs/index.cfm?xpg_id=5602&amp;display_type=HTML">https://cfpub.epa.gov/bf_factsheets/gfs/index.cfm?xpg_id=5602&amp;display_type=HTML</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/702158.pdf">https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/702158.pdf</a></p>	
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- 0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=Gary%20eyes%20J-Pit%20for%20future%20gold&fld-nav-0=YMD\_date&val-nav-0=2000%20-%202020&docref=news/158924E923F1FB08.
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