

AEROMARINE LANDFILL POLLUTION

Where We Stand as of August 7, 2026

By John R. Schneider

For months, residents of Keyport, Union Beach and the surrounding Bayshore area have been asking a very simple question: **What is buried at the former Aeromarine landfill, where has the contamination traveled, and has it affected the health of the people who have lived around it?**

We still do not have a final answer to that question.

But we know considerably more today than we did just a few months ago.

What began as the concerns of local residents—and a disturbing map showing numerous cancer cases in neighborhoods near the former landfill—has developed into a significant environmental and public-health investigation involving the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the New Jersey Department of Health, elected officials, independent scientists, environmental organizations and investigative journalists.

And the evidence now available makes one thing very clear:

Aeromarine is a contaminated landfill that remains improperly closed nearly half a century after dumping ended, and the question of whether contamination has migrated beyond the property deserves a complete and urgent scientific answer.

THE LANDFILL

The Keyport Sanitary Landfill at the former Aeromarine Industrial Park began accepting waste in approximately 1962 and ceased operation in 1979.

That makes Aeromarine what NJDEP calls a **legacy landfill**—a landfill that operated before modern environmental regulations established much stricter requirements for liners, caps, leachate collection, groundwater protection and long-term monitoring.

The problem is not simply that Aeromarine was once a landfill.

The problem is that **the landfill has never been properly closed according to modern state requirements.**

NJDEP's own records show that the existing landfill cap does not meet state closure requirements. The state has repeatedly attempted to compel compliance.

Between 2021 and 2025, NJDEP issued four escalating administrative enforcement orders involving continuing violations associated with closure and post-closure care. According to NJDEP, the penalties assessed through those four actions now total approximately **\$1.223 million**. The cases remain pending in a consolidated proceeding before the New Jersey Office of Administrative Law.

That is an important part of this story.

This is not simply a landfill that closed in 1979 and was forgotten. State regulators have continued to identify problems with the way the property has been maintained and closed.

WE ALREADY KNEW CONTAMINATION WAS THERE

Aeromarine's contamination did not suddenly appear in 2026.

A major environmental investigation completed in 2010 examined soil, soil gas, groundwater, seeps and sediment at the landfill.

That investigation documented contamination above environmental standards, including contamination in groundwater.

At the time, however, investigators concluded that the available information did not demonstrate a completed pathway through which people were being exposed to the contamination.

That distinction has become one of the most important issues in the current controversy.

Finding contamination at a landfill is one question.

Demonstrating that the contamination has moved from the landfill into a place where people can breathe it, drink it, ingest it or otherwise come into contact with it is another.

NJDEP continues to say that, to date, it has **not established a pathway for human exposure** originating at Aeromarine. That does **not** mean the landfill is clean. It means that the state has not yet scientifically demonstrated the route by which contamination from the landfill is reaching people. That is precisely what the current investigation must determine.

THE 2026 TESTING HAS CHANGED THE CONVERSATION

For the first time in approximately 16 years, substantial new environmental testing has taken place at Aeromarine.

In April, NJDEP authorized additional investigation associated with the possible sale and redevelopment of the property. According to NJDEP, the testing program included test pits, geotechnical borings, soil-gas samples and groundwater samples.

The current property owner identified by NJDEP is **Bay Ridge Realty**, and SESI Consulting Engineers has been conducting investigation work on behalf of prospective purchaser **Pacer Group Holdings, LLC**.

The first publicly reported results have been troubling. NJ.com's investigative reporting in late July reported testing from **13 groundwater monitoring wells** at the landfill. According to that reporting, **every one of the 13 wells contained at least one metal at a concentration exceeding New Jersey standards**.

The contaminants reported included arsenic, lead, aluminum, cobalt, iron, manganese and sodium. Even more concerning were two volatile organic chemicals that are established human carcinogens:

Benzene exceeded applicable standards in five wells.

Vinyl chloride exceeded applicable standards in five wells.

Four of those wells reportedly contained **both benzene and vinyl chloride above standards**.

These findings are extremely important because benzene and vinyl chloride are not obscure or harmless chemicals.

Benzene exposure has long been associated with blood disorders and certain blood cancers, including leukemia.

Vinyl chloride is a known human carcinogen associated particularly with liver cancer and has also been studied in connection with other serious illnesses.

NYU toxicologist **Dr. Judith Zelikoff**, who reviewed the new information for NJ.com, stressed that the presence of carcinogens warrants concern and that considerably more environmental testing is necessary to understand the complete picture.

Her point is an important one:

The groundwater samples tell us what is happening beneath portions of the landfill. They do not, by themselves, tell us how far contamination may have traveled.

THE STATE IS CONDUCTING ITS OWN TESTING

NJDEP did not rely entirely upon samples collected for the private investigation.

The department conducted independent groundwater sampling beginning the week of May 25 and completed that work on June 1.

NJDEP also began a broader surface-water investigation on June 9.

That investigation was designed to sample water bodies surrounding the landfill at as many as **24 monitoring locations**.

Importantly, NJDEP said the sampling would take into account **tidal conditions, rainfall, wet-weather conditions and dry-weather conditions**. That is particularly significant for Aeromarine.

This is a waterfront landfill beside the Raritan Bay and Chingarora Creek in an area that is affected by tides, storms, flooding and runoff.

Any serious investigation of potential contaminant migration therefore has to look beyond a few groundwater wells. It must examine how water moves around, through and away from the property under different environmental conditions.

As of August 7, I have not found NJDEP's complete laboratory results from its 2026 groundwater and surface-water testing publicly posted on the state's Aeromarine information page. Those results are now among the most important pieces of information the community is waiting to see.

WHAT ABOUT KEYPORT'S DRINKING WATER?

This needs to be stated clearly because unnecessary rumors can frighten people and distract from the questions that genuinely need answers.

There is currently no evidence that Keyport's municipal drinking water system is contaminated by the Aeromarine landfill.

Keyport's municipal wells are not located at the landfill and draw from confined aquifers that the NJDEP says would not be readily affected by shallow contamination associated with the landfill.

The Keyport Water Department and New Jersey American Water are required to monitor their drinking water under state and federal law, and the state reports that Keyport's drinking water currently meets applicable standards.

Therefore, contaminated shallow groundwater beneath Aeromarine should not be confused with water from a Keyport resident's kitchen faucet. They are different water sources.

That reassurance, however, does not answer the larger environmental question concerning shallow groundwater, surface water, sediment, soil, flooding, or other potential pathways around the landfill.

THEN THERE IS THE CANCER QUESTION

This is the issue that originally brought enormous public attention to Aeromarine.

Early in 2026, former Keyport resident **Rusty Morris** began documenting cancer diagnoses among people who had lived in the neighborhood near the landfill.

What began with several dozen names rapidly expanded.

NJ.com and NJ Advance Media undertook an extensive investigation and commissioned public-health researcher **Dr. Alexis Mraz of The College of New Jersey** to analyze the information.

In June, NJ.com reported that approximately **370 cancer cases had been identified in an area covering roughly 0.6 square mile around the landfill.**

The analysis reported that residents within the study area were approximately **15 percent more likely to have been diagnosed with cancer than Monmouth County residents generally.**

Perhaps even more noteworthy, the analysis found that cancer rates appeared to increase with greater residential proximity to the landfill.

By the end of July, news reports were describing the number of identified cancer cases in the broader investigation as approaching **400**. Those numbers deserve attention. But they must also be described accurately.

No government agency has officially determined that Aeromarine caused these cancers.

No definitive causal relationship between the landfill and the reported illnesses has yet been scientifically established.

Cancer is a complicated disease. Age, genetics, smoking, occupational exposures, lifestyle, environmental exposures and numerous other factors can influence cancer risk.

Establishing an environmental cause requires considerably more than identifying cancers on a map.

It requires epidemiology, environmental sampling, exposure analysis, medical information, geographic information and an understanding of how contaminants could have traveled from their source to the people affected.

But the absence of proven causation does **not** mean the cancer findings should be dismissed.

A statistically unusual pattern of illness, combined with a nearby contaminated landfill, is exactly the kind of situation that warrants careful investigation.

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IS NOW INVOLVED

The New Jersey Department of Health has publicly acknowledged the community's concerns.

In a statement issued July 14, NJDOH said it was committed to conducting a **thorough, science-based, and transparent assessment** of the potential health implications associated with Aeromarine.

The Department of Health has explained that it needs the environmental sampling information before it can properly assess potential exposure.

Once that environmental information becomes available, health officials can examine whether contaminants are present at concentrations and locations that could result in human exposure and whether additional public-health investigation is warranted.

This is why the environmental testing underway now is so important.

The health investigation and the environmental investigation cannot be separated.

Before anyone can responsibly say that Aeromarine caused—or did not cause—illness in the community, we have to understand what contamination is present, where it is located, where it has traveled, and whether people could have encountered it.

OFF-SITE MIGRATION IS NOW THE CENTRAL QUESTION

NJ.com's continuing investigative reporting has increasingly focused attention on the neighborhoods surrounding Aeromarine, not simply on contamination underneath the landfill itself.

Recent reporting has described additional environmental concerns in areas outside the immediate landfill footprint and has raised the possibility that the surrounding neighborhood requires much more extensive testing.

That may ultimately prove to be one of the most important developments in this entire investigation.

However, we must distinguish between independent or media-reported sampling and a completed government determination.

Until the underlying sampling records and the state's own results are fully released and evaluated, I believe the responsible position is to say:

There is enough evidence to justify expanded off-site investigation, but there is not yet enough evidence to declare the question settled.

THE LANDFILL HAS ALSO BEEN SECURED

One visible improvement occurred in June when NJDEP announced that new fencing and warning signs had been installed around portions of the landfill.

The fencing extends from the entrance toward the mean high-water line, and signs warn against trespassing, dumping and hunting or fishing.

That may seem like a small development compared with groundwater contamination and cancer concerns, but it is significant.

One basic requirement at a contaminated landfill is keeping people from inadvertently entering areas where waste or contamination may be exposed.

The site should have been properly secured and closed long ago.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

As of August 7, 2026, I believe we can responsibly say the following:

Aeromarine is contaminated. That is no longer seriously disputed.

The landfill remains improperly closed decades after dumping ended. That is documented by NJDEP.

New testing has again detected contaminants, including the carcinogens benzene and vinyl chloride, in groundwater associated with the landfill. That has now been reported publicly.

Hundreds of cancer cases have been identified in the surrounding community, and a preliminary analysis commissioned by NJ.com found an elevated cancer rate in the study area. That deserves further investigation.

What has **not** yet been established is the final piece of the puzzle:

Has contamination from Aeromarine migrated into the surrounding community in a manner that resulted in human exposure—and, if it has, did that exposure contribute to disease?

Those are two different scientific questions. Neither one should be answered through speculation. But neither should be avoided.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT

The community should now expect several things.

First, **NJDEP should release the complete results of its 2026 groundwater and surface-water sampling as soon as quality-control review is complete.**

Second, the results should be presented geographically—not simply as pages of laboratory numbers. Residents need maps showing where samples were taken, what contaminants were detected, at what concentrations, and how those locations relate to the landfill, surrounding streets, Chingarora Creek and Raritan Bay.

Third, **testing should not stop at the property line if the data provide any indication of migration.**

Appropriate off-site groundwater, surface-water, sediment and soil testing should be conducted wherever environmental science indicates contamination could reasonably have traveled.

Fourth, flooding and tidal movement must be incorporated into the investigation. Aeromarine cannot be evaluated as though it were an isolated inland landfill surrounded by dry ground.

Fifth, NJDOH should proceed with its independent public health assessment as soon as the environmental information is sufficient.

Sixth, the community deserves a clearly defined and publicly available plan for the **permanent closure and remediation of Aeromarine.**

Whether redevelopment eventually becomes part of that solution is secondary. The landfill has existed without proper final closure for far too long.

MY POSITION

I have tried throughout this issue to distinguish between what we know, what we suspect and what remains to be proven. I think that distinction is essential.

We should not tell people that Aeromarine caused hundreds of cancers when science has not yet established that conclusion.

At the same time, we should not allow the lack of a final causal determination to become an excuse for another decade of delay.

The contamination is real. The improper closure of the landfill is real. The environmental violations are real. The newly detected carcinogens are real. And the illnesses our neighbors and their families are reporting are very real. Those facts alone justify the level of investigation now underway.

For nearly half a century, Aeromarine has remained an unresolved environmental problem along the shores of Raritan Bay.

It is time to finish the job.

Test it completely. Determine where the contamination has traveled. Determine whether people have been exposed.

Tell the community what the science shows. And then permanently close and remediate the landfill so that another generation does not inherit the same unanswered questions.

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