Polluted Sites at the Raritan Bayshore (5-4-2026)

Raritan Bay is not affected by a single pollution problem. It is part of a larger industrial, tidal, river-and-bay system shaped by more than a century of landfills, factories, metal processing, chemical use, waterfront dumping, contaminated creeks, stormwater runoff, and old industrial sites that were never designed with modern environmental protections in mind.

The New Jersey waterfront from Perth Amboy, South Amboy, Sayreville, Old Bridge, Laurence Harbor, Cliffwood Beach, Union Beach, Keyport, and the surrounding creeks and marshes contains multiple pollution concerns. Some are officially documented Superfund or NJDEP sites. Others are older industrial or landfill areas that deserve renewed attention.

1. Raritan Bay Slag Site — Old Bridge, Laurence Harbor, Sayreville

One of the best-documented pollution sites on Raritan Bay is the Raritan Bay Slag Superfund Site, located along the Laurence Harbor section of Old Bridge and parts of Sayreville. Industrial slag from metal processing at NL Industries/National Lead in Perth Amboy was used to build shoreline structures, including a seawall and jetty. EPA and NOAA identify the main contaminants as lead and other heavy metals, including arsenic, antimony, and copper. Soil, sediment, surface water, and aquatic organisms were affected, and public access was restricted, and warning signs were posted due to public-health hazards.

This matters because it proves a major point: dangerous industrial waste was not always buried in some hidden inland dump. In some places, it was placed directly along the bayfront, becoming part of the shoreline itself.

2. Keyport — Aeromarine Landfill, Chingarora Creek, Raritan Bay

Keyport's major concern is the former Aeromarine site, which includes old industrial buildings and a landfill area near Chingarora Creek, wetlands, and Raritan Bay. A Keyport public access document describes the Aeromarine site as including approximately 40 acres of extensive landfill adjacent to Chingarora Creek and Raritan Bay, with public access prohibited due to public health, safety, landfill, and wetland concerns.

Recent public concern has focused on reports of a possible cancer cluster near the site. Congressman Frank Pallone's April 17, 2026, statement says that more than 40 cancer cases, including 28 on one street, were identified near the contaminated landfill, and calls for soil, air, and water testing, a cancer data review, and enforcement action. His statement identifies hazardous substances, including benzene, PCBs, heavy metals, methane gas, and contaminated groundwater discharging from the landfill.

At this point, the responsible public message should be clear: pollution has been documented; exposure pathways must be tested; cancer causation has not been officially proven; and the community deserves a transparent investigation.

3. International Flavors & Fragrances — Union Beach/Keyport Area

The former/current International Flavors & Fragrances Inc. facility is another significant documented concern along the Bayshore. EPA states that the facility is being cleaned up under

NJDEP oversight. A groundwater collector trench and slurry wall were installed to prevent contaminated groundwater from flowing into Raritan Bay. EPA also states that contaminated soil has been excavated or capped, and a deed notice remains because hazardous constituents remain above residential standards.

This does not mean IFF is responsible for the present Keyport cancer concerns. It means the Bayshore has more than one documented pollution source, and any serious regional review should include all known facilities, groundwater controls, historic industrial uses, and remaining deed restrictions.

4. Sayreville Landfill and South River Wetlands

The Sayreville Landfill is an EPA Superfund site. EPA says the Borough of Sayreville operated the 35-acre landfill from 1971 to August 1977, accepting municipal solid waste and some light industrial waste. Hazardous wastes disposed of during and after closure contaminated soil and groundwater, and part of the site lies within tidal wetlands of the adjacent South River.

This is important because pollution in Raritan Bay is not just a beach problem. It is also a problem involving rivers, marshes, groundwater, and tidal wetlands. Contaminants can move through groundwater, surface runoff, tidal exchange, sediment disturbance, and creek systems.

5. Perth Amboy Industrial Waterfront

Perth Amboy has a long industrial waterfront history, including metal processing, scrap operations, brownfields, and sites along the Raritan River. One Perth Amboy brownfield project at the former Harry S. Goldberg and Sons Scrap Metal Recycling property involved contaminants including chlorinated VOCs, PAHs, PCBs, lead, and other metals.

Perth Amboy is also tied historically to the Raritan Bay Slag problem because NOAA identifies the slag as originating from NL Industries' Perth Amboy operation.

6. Creeks, Marshes, and Smaller Waterways

The creeks are not minor details. They are part of the pollution story.

Chingarora Creek is central to the Keyport/Aeromarine issue because the landfill area sits near the creek, wetlands, and Raritan Bay.

Cheesequake Creek is tied to the Raritan Bay Slag site because slag was used near the federal navigational jetty at the Cheesequake Creek inlet.

Margaret's Creek is also part of the Raritan Bay Slag cleanup area, with federal settlement materials referencing hazardous releases into Margaret's Creek Marsh and Raritan Bay.

South River is connected to the Sayreville Landfill and nearby tidal wetlands.

7. Main Contaminants of Concern

Across the Raritan Bay waterfront, the recurring contaminants include:

Lead, arsenic, antimony, copper, PCBs, benzene, vinyl chloride, methane gas, VOCs, PAHs, petroleum-related compounds, contaminated groundwater, contaminated sediments, and landfill gases.

These contaminants do not all behave the same way. Heavy metals often remain in soil and sediment. VOCs can move through groundwater and sometimes vaporize. Methane can build up as landfill gas. PCBs and PAHs can persist in sediment and bioaccumulate in fish and aquatic organisms.

8. Exposure Pathways

People may be exposed through several possible pathways, depending on the site:

Direct contact with contaminated soil, slag, shoreline debris, or sediment.

Breathing contaminated dust, vapors, or landfill gases.

Groundwater movement beneath properties.

Surface water runoff into creeks, wetlands, and the bay.

Sediment disturbance during storms, flooding, construction, erosion, dredging, or shoreline work.

Fish, crabs, clams, and aquatic organisms may accumulate contaminants.

Conclusion

The Raritan Bay pollution story is not one site, one town, or one company. It is a regional legacy. Keyport's Aeromarine landfill deserves urgent attention, but it sits within a larger pattern of industrial dumping, contaminated shorelines, brownfields, creeks, wetlands, and old landfills across the New Jersey side of Raritan Bay.

The public should not panic, but the public should insist on facts. We need maps, test results, health data review, public meetings, enforcement, and plain-language explanations from qualified environmental and health officials.

The bay gave these towns life. Now the communities along the bay deserve to know what was left behind.