

CHRONOLOGY OF POLLUTION CONCERNS IN KEYPORT

Updated August 8, 2026

Before Aeromarine: Keyport as a working waterfront

Before anyone called this an environmental problem, Keyport was a working waterfront town. Its shoreline, creeks, marshes, boatyards, industrial yards, shellfish beds, rail spurs, docks and fill areas all became part of the story. Pollution in Keyport should not be treated as one single event or one single villain. A better historical frame is that Keyport developed during an era when waterfront land was routinely regarded as useful, fillable and industrial. Marshes were filled, shoreline edges were altered, and wastes were commonly pushed toward the water. What today appears to be a single contaminated “site” existed within a much larger industrial waterfront landscape.

1908–1914: The aviation story begins

The roots of Aeromarine reach back to Inglis M. Upperco's involvement with early aviation experiments in Keyport. The Keyport Historical Society dates the Aeromarine Plane and Motor Company in Keyport from 1914 to 1930, with beginnings in 1908 when Upperco began financing aeronautical experimentation by a small Keyport company. This distinction matters environmentally as well as historically. The property did not begin as a landfill. It first became an aviation and industrial complex involving aircraft, engines, machinery, fuels, paints and coatings, metals, shops and industrial handling. The landfill came decades later.

1917–1920s: World War I production and industrial expansion

Aeromarine's industrial activities expanded during and after World War I, when military aircraft and seaplane production increased. Manufacturing of aircraft and engines in that era ordinarily involved fuels, oils, paints, varnishes, metals, solvents, plating operations, degreasers and similar industrial materials. That history provides legitimate subjects for investigation, but it should not be stated that particular chemicals were dumped at Aeromarine during these years unless documentation or sampling can establish it. The manufacturing history and the later landfill history are related subjects, but they are not the same thing.

1928–1930s: Aeromarine-Klemm and the end of the aviation era

From 1928 to approximately 1930 the company operated as Aeromarine-Klemm Corporation. The adjacent airfield reportedly remained in use into the late 1930s. After aviation activity diminished, the property's identity gradually shifted toward industrial, storage, fill and ultimately landfill uses. This remains an important period for deed, tax-map, Sanborn-map and aerial-photograph research.

1940s–1950s: The poorly documented period

The 1940s and 1950s remain one of the largest gaps in the chronology. Many New Jersey marsh and waterfront locations were filled before modern environmental regulation existed, but publicly available material does not yet provide a reliable year-by-year account of what was placed at Aeromarine during these decades. Borough records, historic aerial photographs, deeds, corporate records, oral histories and predecessor-agency files should continue to be examined.

1962–1979: The Keyport Sanitary Landfill operates

NJDEP now identifies 1962 as the beginning of landfill operations and 1979 as the year operations ceased. The landfill operated before the modern system of engineered liners, leachate collection, methane controls, extensive groundwater monitoring and formal closure requirements that apply today. This 17-year operating period remains central to understanding the present environmental problem.

June 1977: Keyport threatens legal action

A contemporary newspaper article, “Keyport ready to sue on landfill,” reported that Mayor William Ralph threatened court action unless state authorities met with the Borough Council regarding a landfill operated by Waste Disposal Inc. The borough alleged that the landfill was exceeding its licensed height, lacked adequate daily cover, produced odors, allowed leaching into the soil and contributed to pollution moving toward Chingarora Creek and Keyport Harbor.

This document is important because it establishes that municipal officials were expressing serious concern about landfill operations before the state finally ordered the facility closed. It does not, by itself, establish that the threatened lawsuit was actually filed.

1979: DEP orders the landfill closed

In 1979, New Jersey ordered landfill operations to cease, citing numerous operating and engineering deficiencies and exhaustion of capacity. The central issue that followed was that **closure of dumping operations was not the same as proper environmental closure of the landfill itself**. Decades later, DEP continues to state that the landfill must be properly capped and closed under state requirements.

1986 forward: Repeated state inspections and violations

Records summarized by Congressman Frank Pallone indicate that state inspections beginning at least as early as 1986 repeatedly documented environmental violations. This period deserves additional research because the underlying inspection reports may establish precisely what regulators knew, when they knew it and what corrective action was ordered or not ordered.

1989: Keyport planning documents recognize environmental limitations

Keyport's 1989 Master Plan treated Aeromarine as a property whose future development had to account for the landfill. Planning objectives called for environmental review, restrictions related to environmental conditions, open space and eventual waterfront access. The environmental problem was therefore part of formal municipal planning decades before the present cancer concerns emerged.

1990s: Ownership and responsibility remain important research questions

The post-closure chain of title remains important. A complete legal chronology should identify the owner during each period, the parties receiving DEP notices, and the entity responsible for closure, maintenance and remediation. Current official records identify **Bay Ridge Realty** as the present owner of the landfill property.

2001: Redevelopment study recommended

Keyport's 2001 Reexamination Report recommended determining whether Aeromarine qualified as an area in need of redevelopment. Environmental conditions were therefore being treated not merely as individual complaints but as a central obstacle to the property's future use.

2005: Aeromarine Area Redevelopment Plan

The 2005 redevelopment plan called for remediation of harmful environmental conditions and envisioned eventual public access to Raritan Bay and Chingarora Creek. It contemplated substantial open space and possible recreational use of properly closed portions of the landfill. Cleanup, redevelopment and waterfront access were explicitly linked.

2010: Solar redevelopment considered

A 2010 solar overlay amendment offered an alternative redevelopment concept involving a ground-mounted solar facility. Later planning records acknowledged that landfill cleanup costs might make residential or recreational redevelopment difficult.

2010–2011: Environmental investigation documents serious problems

A major site investigation documented contamination and deficiencies in the landfill cap. Records later cited by Pallone and the Borough referenced hazardous substances and conditions involving heavy metals, methane, benzene, PCBs and contaminated soil and groundwater, with concerns involving Chingarora Creek and Raritan Bay.

Keyport's Municipal Public Access Plan later acknowledged that although the environmental investigation met DEP investigation requirements, the existing landfill cap still required improvement. The investigation did not mean that the landfill had been remediated or properly closed.

2012–2015: Public access remains restricted

Municipal planning documents described approximately 40 acres of landfill adjacent to wetlands, Chingarora Creek and Raritan Bay. Public access to the waterfront along the site was restricted because of health, safety and environmental concerns associated with the landfill, even though access to portions of the beach remained possible from Walnut Street.

2012: Superstorm Sandy demonstrates the site's flood and shoreline vulnerability

Keyport's post-Sandy planning documents noted that during the storm surge the Aeromarine property essentially became an island, with the elevated landfill among the portions that remained above water. That history does not prove that contaminants moved into residential neighborhoods during Sandy or later storms, but it makes tidal influence, flooding, stormwater and contaminant movement legitimate subjects for present investigation.

2021: Borough litigation

Pallone's 2026 correspondence states that a 2021 Borough of Keyport lawsuit against Bay Ridge Realty referenced deficiencies identified in earlier environmental work, including lack of adequate engineering controls, migration of solid waste outside portions of the landfill, hazardous substances in soil and groundwater and impacts involving Chingarora Creek. The complete court file remains an important source for determining legal responsibility and prior notice.

2021–2025: DEP enforcement escalates to more than \$1.2 million

This section can now be substantially corrected and strengthened.

DEP's dedicated Keyport Landfill records state that it issued **four escalating Administrative Orders and Notices of Civil Administrative Penalty Assessment** between 2021 and 2025, dated July 30, 2021; April 26, 2023; July 19, 2024; and January 31, 2025.

The total penalties assessed under those four actions are **\$1,223,000**. The cases are pending together before the New Jersey Office of Administrative Law. Earlier reporting commonly referred to “nearly \$900,000,” but the DEP's current official total is \$1.223 million.

2024: Lead and arsenic-bearing material appears along the shoreline

Chunks of industrial material or slag appeared along the Keyport shoreline near Aeromarine. Testing prompted warnings about arsenic and lead, and state officials removed hazardous material and posted warnings. The episode demonstrated that historic industrial material was still capable of becoming exposed along the shoreline decades after Aeromarine's manufacturing era.

Early 2026: Residents begin mapping cancer cases

The present public-health controversy grew after residents began documenting cancer diagnoses among current and former Keyport residents. Rusty Morris created a map that initially identified approximately 41 reported cases borough-wide, including 28 associated with First Street and the immediate neighborhood.

These were community-reported cases rather than an epidemiological study. Nevertheless, their geographic concentration generated substantial public concern and attracted the attention of journalists, health officials and elected representatives.

April 2026: The issue becomes a major public crisis

By April, reporting on the cancer cases and the long-unresolved Aeromarine landfill brought national and regional attention to Keyport. Scientists and health officials cautioned that a map of reported cancers cannot by itself establish either an official cancer cluster or causation by a particular environmental source. That distinction remains important today.

April 17, 2026: Pallone demands coordinated state and federal action

Congressman Frank Pallone asked NJDEP, NJDOH, EPA Region 2 and federal health agencies to investigate the landfill and surrounding community. His requests included soil, groundwater, sediment and air testing; investigation of migration into Chingarora Creek, Raritan Bay and surrounding neighborhoods; examination of cancer data; site security; mitigation of methane and continuing leaching; enforcement of penalties; and regular communication with residents.

April 21–23, 2026: State and local action accelerates

News reports described pressure from Mayor Rose Araneo, the Borough Council, residents and environmental advocates. On April 23, NJDEP issued a **Landfill Disruption Approval** allowing new investigation work at the property.

The permit identified **Bay Ridge Realty** as the current owner and authorized **SESI Consulting Engineers**, acting on behalf of prospective purchaser **Pacer Group Holdings, LLC**, to conduct soil, groundwater, soil-gas and geotechnical investigations. DEP also announced that it would conduct independent sampling alongside that work.

DEP later specified that the prospective purchaser's investigation included **18 test pits, two geotechnical borings, eight soil-gas samples and 14 groundwater samples**.

April 24, 2026: Prospective purchaser publicly commits to investigation and cleanup planning

Pacer Partners announced that it was the contract purchaser of the Aeromarine and former municipal landfill property and said it intended to investigate, remediate and eventually return the property to productive use. Pacer stated that it had been working with NJDEP and SESI since August 2025. The prospective sale therefore became intertwined with the environmental investigation.

April 28, 2026: EPA Administrator questioned directly

Pallone raised Aeromarine during a congressional hearing with EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin. Zeldin stated that he was familiar with the site, had been briefed by EPA Region 2 and understood its importance. He said NJDEP remained the lead enforcement agency and had not at that point requested EPA assistance, but that the federal agency was prepared to help.

April 28, 2026: Community organization expands

Residents increasingly organized outside regular Borough Council meetings. Sal Liguori and other residents began holding gatherings and pushing for faster testing, cleanup, health evaluation and government accountability. News 12 reported a grassroots effort involving families affected by cancer and pollution concerns.

April 30, 2026: NJDEP and NJDOH issue coordinated public statement

The state formally announced a coordinated environmental and public-health response.

NJDEP stated that Keyport's municipal drinking-water system was meeting state and federal drinking-water standards and that the public wells supplying Keyport are not located near the landfill. The wells are in confined aquifers considered relatively protected from shallow landfill contamination.

The state also made an important distinction: determining whether contaminants have migrated off the Aeromarine property and whether an **exposure pathway** exists would be the first step before NJDOH could evaluate potential health consequences.

NJDOH stated that once adequate environmental data became available, it could independently evaluate the potential public-health implications and examine appropriate cancer-registry information.

May 2026: State officials emphasize “exposure pathways”

From this point forward, the question of an environmental **pathway** became central to the official state position. Finding contamination at the landfill does not automatically prove that people were exposed. Investigators must determine whether contaminants could move from the source to residents through groundwater, surface water, soil, air, sediment, flooding, direct contact, recreation or some other route.

This scientific distinction has become one of the central disagreements between residents and the state.

May 12, 2026: State legislators announce accelerated testing

State Sen. Declan O'Scanlon, Assemblywoman Victoria Flynn and Assemblyman Gerry Scharfenberger announced that DEP testing of wells at Aeromarine would proceed, alongside testing conducted for the prospective purchaser. Residents were told that more information would be provided at a large May 17 town hall.

May 17, 2026: Major public town hall at Keyport High School

Hundreds of concerned residents and officials gathered at Keyport High School. Acting DEP Commissioner **Ed Potosnak** and representatives of the Department of Health addressed the community.

Potosnak said DEP's ultimate objective was the same one residents were demanding: the landfill must be properly closed and must not pose a public-health risk. He disclosed that he had personally visited the site and said DEP would conduct its own testing in conjunction with the prospective purchaser's work.

DEP Chief Strategy Officer **Kati Angarone** explained that identifying possible exposure pathways would guide further investigation. Residents repeatedly challenged officials over why the landfill had remained improperly closed for so many decades and why neighborhood testing had not already occurred.

State officials continued to say that Keyport's municipal drinking water met required standards.

May 20, 2026: Residents begin commissioning their own testing

Frustrated with the pace and scope of government work, some residents began paying for independent environmental testing. Sal Liguori, whose property is close to the Aeromarine area, arranged testing involving soil vapors and air around his property. He publicly urged officials to extend environmental testing outside the landfill itself.

May 25–June 1, 2026: DEP groundwater sampling

DEP began collecting samples from existing shallow groundwater monitoring wells during the week of May 25. Sampling concluded June 1. The samples were sent to a New Jersey-certified laboratory for analysis of contaminants.

June 9, 2026: DEP begins surface-water sampling

DEP expanded its investigation into surrounding waterways, establishing as many as **24 monitoring stations**. Sampling was designed to account for tidal influence as well as wet- and dry-weather conditions.

This is particularly significant because Aeromarine lies directly beside Chingarora Creek and Raritan Bay and because residents have repeatedly questioned whether tides, flooding and storms might provide pathways for contaminant movement.

June 26, 2026: New fencing and warning signs installed

DEP reported that new fencing and signage had been installed at the landfill. Fencing extends from the entrance gate toward the mean high-water line, and bilingual warning signs prohibit trespassing, dumping, hunting and fishing.

The action addressed one of the concerns raised earlier by residents and Pallone: despite decades of known problems, access to portions of the landfill and adjacent shoreline had remained relatively easy.

July 2026: Community-reported cancer cases approach 400

As residents continued gathering names, the number of reported cancer diagnoses associated with people who had lived in Keyport increased from the original 41 to **nearly 400**.

This number must continue to be described carefully. It represents cases reported to community organizers and journalists; it is not yet a state determination that 400 cancers constitute a statistically significant cluster, nor does it establish that Aeromarine caused those cancers.

July 10, 2026: A prominent community advocate announces his own cancer diagnosis

Salvatore Liguori announced that he had been diagnosed with early-stage chronic lymphocytic leukemia. He continued advocating for expanded environmental testing and began working toward bringing mobile cancer-screening services to the community.

Liguori also reported that independent testing at his property detected benzene. His test results increased public concern but should be distinguished from government-supervised sampling.

July 21–22, 2026: Independent testing receives national attention

NewsNation and other national outlets began reporting independent environmental testing associated with the community.

Independent tester Scott Smith collected samples outside portions of the landfill and around residential property and reported detections involving dioxins and PCBs. One soil result was reported as approximately **31 parts per trillion toxic equivalency**, compared by Smith with a 4.8-ppt screening value. These results were not collected or validated by NJDEP or EPA and therefore should be identified in the chronology as **independent preliminary evidence**, not a government finding.

July 22, 2026: Waterspirit community meeting

Waterspirit held a Keyport Climate Café at the Community Church of Keyport, providing residents another forum outside Borough Council meetings to discuss the environmental crisis and its emotional and community effects.

News 12 reported residents' frustration while awaiting DEP results and described the rapidly growing community cancer map.

Late July 2026: Prospective-purchaser groundwater testing reveals significant contamination

Testing associated with the prospective purchase provided the first major new groundwater dataset from the landfill in many years.

According to news reports summarizing the results, **all 13 wells tested contained at least one metal exceeding New Jersey groundwater standards**. Reported metals included arsenic, lead, aluminum, cobalt, iron, manganese and sodium.

Benzene was reported above applicable standards in **five of the 13 wells**, and vinyl chloride was reported above standards in **five wells**. Four wells reportedly contained both benzene and vinyl chloride above standards.

The results strongly reinforced what was already known—that significant contamination remains beneath the landfill. They still did not establish that those contaminants had reached residential properties or entered residents' bodies.

Late July 2026: PFAS enters the Aeromarine discussion

Reporting on the newer testing also identified PFAS or “forever chemicals” among substances detected in the investigation. The presence, concentrations and significance of PFAS should be evaluated from the complete laboratory reports when they become publicly available rather than from news summaries alone.

Late July 2026: State says it has not identified a human-exposure pathway

Despite evidence of serious contamination within the landfill, NJDEP's public position remained that its review had **not yet identified evidence of a pathway through which landfill contamination was exposing residents**.

DEP also stated that it had not identified another contaminated site in the surrounding community that currently required action.

That statement should not be rewritten as “DEP proved residents are safe.” It means that based on the data it had reviewed at that point, the department had not demonstrated an exposure pathway.

July 30, 2026: Continuing public meeting and political pressure

Another community meeting was held in Keyport, attended by Congressman Pallone and residents seeking expanded investigation. By this point, the focus of community demands had increasingly shifted from merely testing the landfill to **testing residential neighborhoods themselves**.

Late July–early August 2026: Scientific disagreement focuses on off-site movement

Independent scientists reviewing the available information raised questions about whether it was premature to dismiss water, flooding, soil migration and other pathways without testing surrounding neighborhoods.

NYU toxicologist Judith Zelikoff was among those publicly calling for testing outside the landfill. Journalists also highlighted Keyport's history of flooding and the unanswered question of whether tidal or storm events could move contamination beyond the property.

This does not prove that such migration has occurred, but it strengthens the argument that residential sampling is necessary to answer the question.

August 5–7, 2026: Community pressure shifts toward residential property testing

Residents and community organizations increasingly called on Governor Mikie Sherrill, NJDEP and federal authorities to expand sampling beyond the Aeromarine boundary.

A fundamental question emerged: **If officials cannot demonstrate contamination on residential property because residential property has not been comprehensively tested, how confidently can they rule out a residential exposure pathway?**

The scientifically appropriate answer is to obtain more data.

August 7, 2026: Pallone formally asks EPA to test Keyport neighborhoods

This is one of the most important developments since the April chronology.

Congressman Pallone wrote directly to EPA Administrator **Lee Zeldin** and EPA Region 2 Administrator **Mike Martucci**, asking the federal agency to perform **community-based environmental testing in residential areas outside the Aeromarine landfill**.

Pallone specifically acknowledged that independent researchers had released results indicating **potential soil contamination beyond the landfill**. Significantly, he also cautioned that those independent results had **not been vetted or overseen by a government agency**.

Rather than accepting or dismissing the independent results, Pallone argued that the appropriate response was for EPA to test the residential areas and determine whether the preliminary findings are valid.

August 7, 2026: EPA request represents an important change in emphasis

In April, EPA Administrator Zeldin had said NJDEP was leading the matter and had not asked EPA for assistance. By August 7, Pallone was explicitly asking the federal agency to step in and perform additional neighborhood testing.

That does not yet mean EPA has agreed to conduct the testing. As of the morning of August 8, no public EPA acceptance of Pallone's request has been located.

August 7, 2026: Community pollution meeting at the Keyport American Legion

Residents gathered again at the American Legion in Keyport on Friday evening to discuss the pollution issue, health concerns, testing and the community's continuing demand for answers.

As of the early morning hours of August 8, a detailed published account of everything said at that particular meeting had not yet appeared in the major news sources reviewed. The meeting should nevertheless be included in the chronology as another indication that the issue has developed from an environmental enforcement problem into an organized community public-health movement.

Evidence status: community event confirmed; detailed minutes, speaker list and press accounts should be added when available.

August 8, 2026: Where the case stands

Nearly five decades after dumping stopped, the Keyport Sanitary Landfill still has not achieved the proper closure DEP says is required.

What is now established is substantial:

The landfill contains serious contamination. Newer groundwater testing continues to identify metals and carcinogenic chemicals above environmental standards. DEP has issued \$1.223 million in penalties over continuing closure and post-closure violations. The state has sampled groundwater and surrounding surface waters. Fencing and warning signs have finally been installed. Independent tests have raised new questions about contamination outside the landfill. Nearly 400 cancers have been reported to community organizers. Congressman Pallone has now formally requested EPA residential testing.

What has **not** yet been established is equally important:

No government agency has determined that Aeromarine caused the reported cancers. NJDOH has not formally designated Keyport an environmental cancer cluster attributable to the landfill.

NJDEP continues to state that it has not demonstrated a human-exposure pathway from the landfill to residents. Independent neighborhood testing has not yet been replicated or validated through a comprehensive government-supervised residential sampling program.

The next decisive step should therefore be clear: **systematic environmental testing outside the landfill boundary**—including appropriate residential soil, shallow groundwater where scientifically relevant, surface water, sediment and other exposure media identified by qualified investigators—followed by a transparent comparison of those findings with the landfill contamination.

Only after the environmental pathway question is adequately investigated can public-health officials meaningfully address the larger question that has haunted Keyport since this crisis began:

Did the contamination remain at Aeromarine, or did some of it reach the people who lived around it?

That question remains unanswered on August 8, 2026.

Principal sources for the continuing chronology

Borough of Keyport planning and redevelopment records; Keyport Municipal Public Access Plan; Keyport Strategic Recovery Planning Report; Keyport Historical Society; New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Keyport Landfill records and enforcement actions; New Jersey Department of Health; Congressman Frank Pallone; News 12 New Jersey; Asbury Park Press; NJ.com/Star-Ledger reporting; Patch; NewsNation; Waterspirit; Pacer Partners/SESI investigation materials; independent environmental testing; resident testimony and community documentation.

Continuing research priorities

The chronology should remain a living document. The most important records still to obtain or fully analyze include the complete 1970s landfill permit and closure file; all DEP inspection reports beginning in the 1980s; the complete chain of title; the full 2010–2011 investigation; the 2021 Borough lawsuit and subsequent orders; all four DEP enforcement actions totaling \$1.223 million; complete 2026 SESI/Pacer laboratory results; complete DEP groundwater and surface-water results; DEP's analysis of the independent data; any NJDOH cancer-registry or public-health assessment; EPA's response to Pallone's August 7 request; and any government-supervised residential testing conducted from this point forward.

**Chronology originally prepared by John R. Schneider.
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