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## Another Fire at State's Largest Landfill, Advocates Ask 'What's in the Smoke?'

1 message

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News from Seneca Lake Guardian

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## Another Fire at State's Largest Landfill, Advocates Ask 'What's in the Smoke?'

SENECA FALLS, NY (03/07/2023) (readMedia)-- [Late on Saturday](#), a fire at Seneca Meadows – the state's largest landfill – required the response of multiple local fire departments. [In January](#), there was another fire at the landfill that demanded emergency personnel. In response, Seneca Lake Guardian issued the following statement:

"We already know Seneca Meadows produces 200,000 gallons of toxic, PFAS laden leachate every day, threatening our fresh water sources. We also know living in close proximity to the landfill and the unseen gasses it produces comes with the risk of mortality from lung cancer. The recent fires at the landfill are disturbing, and what we need to know now is, what contaminants are in the smoke? The landfill already pollutes our water, land and air – the Governor must take action and direct the DEC to close Seneca Meadows on schedule in 2025," said **Yvonne Taylor, vice president of Seneca Lake Guardian.**

"The latest fire at the Industrial Complex we know as Seneca Meadows, the second fire at the same Leachate Evaporation facility within a year, raises grave concern for an operation that we see and smell everyday but know very little about. This past October the suspected dumping of untreated Leachate into the Public sewer system resulted in noxious fumes entering area businesses sickening employees. It is becoming more evident every day that safe operations at the Dump are becoming more and more unattainable. From a major Landfill Cell collapse in 2021, a Trailer fire in 2023, Raw Leachate dumping in 2022 to Two Leachate Processing Facility fires in one year, it is clearly time for the DEC and perhaps the EPA to shut this facility down before there is an event which results in a serious compromise to Public Health and Safety," **added Steve Churchill, Seneca Falls Town Councilman.**

[Located in Seneca Falls and standing nearly 30 stories tall, Seneca Meadows landfill produces 75 million gallons of leachate annually.](#) Less than one-third is treated to remove PFAS and other contaminants. The rest – over 50 million gallons – is trucked, untreated, to Buffalo, Watertown, Chittenango and Steuben County wastewater treatment plants, which are not required to test for and don't have the mechanism for removing the PFAS. The discharges from those plants flow into and potentially contaminate drinking water sources.

The landfill can be smelled from miles away and exposes residents to unseen gasses and particulate matter that have been linked with mortality from lung cancer and respiratory illness. Landfills account for 17 percent of total methane emissions, a greenhouse gas more than [25 times as potent](#) as carbon dioxide. Waste Connections, the landfill's operator, [filed documents with the DEC](#) to add 47 acres of new landfill space in the so-called valley infill between its two existing facilities and allow the landfill to continue operating through 2040. Closing Seneca Meadows on schedule would be consistent with the Governor's [proposed \\$5.5 billion investment](#) to reduce emissions and invest in clean air and water.

### Background

The Seneca Meadows landfill, located in Seneca Falls, the birthplace of American Women's Rights, is the largest of 27 landfills in New York State. It is permitted to accept 6,000 tons of waste and produces up to 200,000 gallons of polluted leachate – formed when rainwater filters through waste – per day. A quarter of the landfill – which stands at nearly 30 stories tall – is trash from NYC, followed by four other states.

Seneca Meadows was previously required to stop receiving waste and halt operations by December 31, 2025. However, Waste Connections, the Texas based parent company of Seneca Meadows Inc., spent around \$200,000 in 2021 promoting pro-landfill candidates who won seats in Town Board and County races and are now supporting the Valley Infill, SMI's planned seven-story high expansion. The expansion would keep the landfill operating through 2040 with allowable dumping on the Valley Infill (the former toxic Tantalito superfund site), rising another 70 feet into the viewscape. Even with the planned closure in 2025, the mountain of garbage promises years of problems and remediation that could take generations to mitigate.

Leachate and wastewater runoff from the landfill contain per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which can cause widespread contamination of drinking water and harmful health impacts. Landfills are one of four major sources of PFAS, and [landfills account for 17 percent of total methane emissions](#).

SMI is located two miles from Cayuga-Seneca Canal and three miles from every school in Seneca Falls and Waterloo, potentially exposing students to airborne particulates and unseen gasses known to contribute to respiratory illness, asthma, and migraine headaches. The landfill cannot process all of the methane that is generated and is forced to burn almost a billion cubic feet per year in 5 flares, contributing to climate change.

SMI is harming the Finger Lakes' natural resources that have led to the region being under consideration for a [National Heritage Area Designation](#), and which the \$3 billion, 60,000-employee wine and agritourism economy relies on. The odor from the landfill can be smelled from miles away, including at Thruway exit 41, the northern gateway to the Finger Lakes. Large, sustainable employers in the area are finding it difficult to recruit and retain employees, because nobody wants to raise a family near a dangerous landfill.

SMI's expansion is also at odds with the overwhelmingly popular amendment to the New York state constitution passed last year, which guarantees every New Yorker the right to clean air, clean water, and a healthful environment.

A recent Rockefeller Institute policy brief showed that New York is one of nine states that falls well short of the [EPA guidance on enforceable drinking water standards for PFAS](#).

The "[PFAS Surface Water Discharge Disclosure Act](#)" – introduced by Senator May and Assembly Member Kelles last year – would require annual testing for all facilities permitted to discharge water. There are no federal or state regulations currently requiring PFAS disclosures from all facilities that might be discharging it.

DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos [recently tweeted](#) about his agency's intentions to "better serve disadvantaged communities all across New York," which should include SMI. According to the draft criteria of the Climate Justice Working Group – established by the Climate Act – there [are five disadvantaged communities](#) in Seneca County.

### **About Seneca Lake Guardian**

Seneca Lake Guardian is a New York State Not-for-Profit Corporation with 501(c)(3) and is dedicated to preserving and protecting the health of the Finger Lakes, its residents and visitors, its rural community character, and its agricultural and tourist related businesses through public education, citizen participation, engagement with decision makers, and networking with like-minded organizations.

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Seneca Lake Guardian, A Waterkeeper Affiliate