

FACT SHEET

New York Times Articles Perpetuate Myths About Seneca Meadows Landfill October 2, 2023

OVERVIEW

On September 17, The New York Times [published](#) an article titled “Why a Landfill as Tall as the Statue of Liberty May Rise Even Higher.” Another article, titled “Surrounded by Trash, a Reporter Scours for Answers,” was [published](#) on September 28. Neither article looked very far for answers. Instead, the articles include inaccurate claims and statements about the Seneca Meadows Landfill, a municipal solid waste landfill located in Waterloo, New York. As the first article acknowledges, waste generated in New York requires proper management and disposal—an essential service provided by the Seneca Meadows Landfill for residents, businesses, and municipalities. However, the articles also include serious, unvetted misconceptions about the following issues:

- Odors
- Chemical discharges
- Local tourism

Prior to publication, the first article’s author, who is also interviewed in the second article, was made aware that many of these groundless positions were countered by facts available on Seneca Meadows’ [website](#). No effort was made to incorporate this readily available information or to correct the misleading and incorrect statements by Landfill opponents.

MISCONCEPTION ABOUT ODORS

Data demonstrates that while landfills have the potential to emit odorous gases, Seneca Meadows effectively manages these emissions in accordance with Federal and state law, and diligently works to mitigate offsite odors in the following ways:

- State-of-the-art equipment and operational practices to control and capture its landfill gas, including use of soil cover and NYSDEC-approved alternative daily cover, perimeter misting systems, and a robust landfill gas collection and control system.
 - This gas is reused to generate electricity and supplement the local natural gas supply.
 - This is contrary to the second article’s statement that the landfill is “pockmarked with vents that allow gas to escape.” In fact, this is part of the facility’s gas collection specifically installed to *prevent* landfill gas from escaping to the atmosphere.
- The effectiveness of the measures Seneca Meadows employs is confirmed by air monitoring data continuously collected since 2022 at the facility’s perimeter:
 - Detections of hydrogen sulfide, the main compound associated with landfill odors, have been extremely rare; in excess of 98% of the time hydrogen sulfide has not even been detected.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CHEMICALS

The first NYT article also includes unfounded statements asserting the Landfill is a source of “dangerous chemicals,” such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (“PFAS”), that threaten the community, the Finger Lakes, the water supply, agriculture, and local tourism. The second article then loosely refers to leachate generated at all municipal solid waste landfills as the “landfill’s toxins.” However, readily available information and multiple datapoints prove that these claims are baseless and without context:

- Independent air sampling in the community in 2013 and 2019 did not find any air quality or health concerns. Nor is there any data to suggest the Landfill is impacting any of the Finger Lakes.
- Seneca Meadows does not manufacture or use PFAS. Rather, Seneca Meadows receives discarded materials containing PFAS that are ubiquitous in residential and commercial waste streams. Landfills sequester most of the PFAS they receive. Landfills were identified by EPA as a preferred option to manage PFAS impacted waste streams.
 - Seneca Meadows therefore provides a responsible approach to encapsulating waste that may contain PFAS.
 - Seneca Meadows follows all leachate disposal requirements.
 - Locally, Seneca Meadows goes even further - leachate sent to a local wastewater treatment plant is first treated to remove PFAS, and the plant does not discharge to the Finger Lakes.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LOCAL TOURISM

The first article also implies that Seneca Meadows negatively impacts local tourism in the region. However, [data shows](#) that local tourism in Seneca County is thriving:

- According to Empire State Development, tourism in the Finger Lakes Region in 2022 (\$3.98B) grew by nearly 25% percent over 2021 levels (\$3.19B).
- Tourism in Seneca County grew by 22.2%—well above pre-pandemic levels.
- Tourism-generated labor income in Seneca County consisted of 5.9% of total labor income, exceeding the Finger Lakes Region average (3.2%).
- Tourism jobs in Seneca County make up 10.2% of the labor force, also above the Finger Lakes Region average (5.7%).

“Exporting” essential waste management obligations based on inaccurate and misleading perceptions of Seneca Meadows is not a responsible solution and would only increase greenhouse gas emissions as waste is trucked to other states, contravening the goals of New York’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.