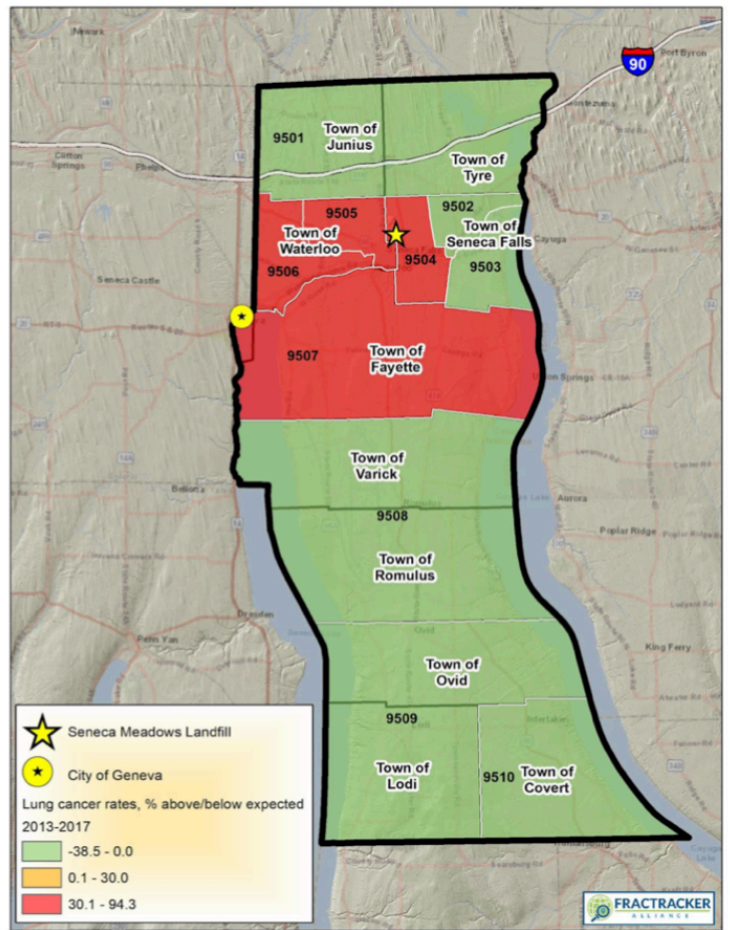
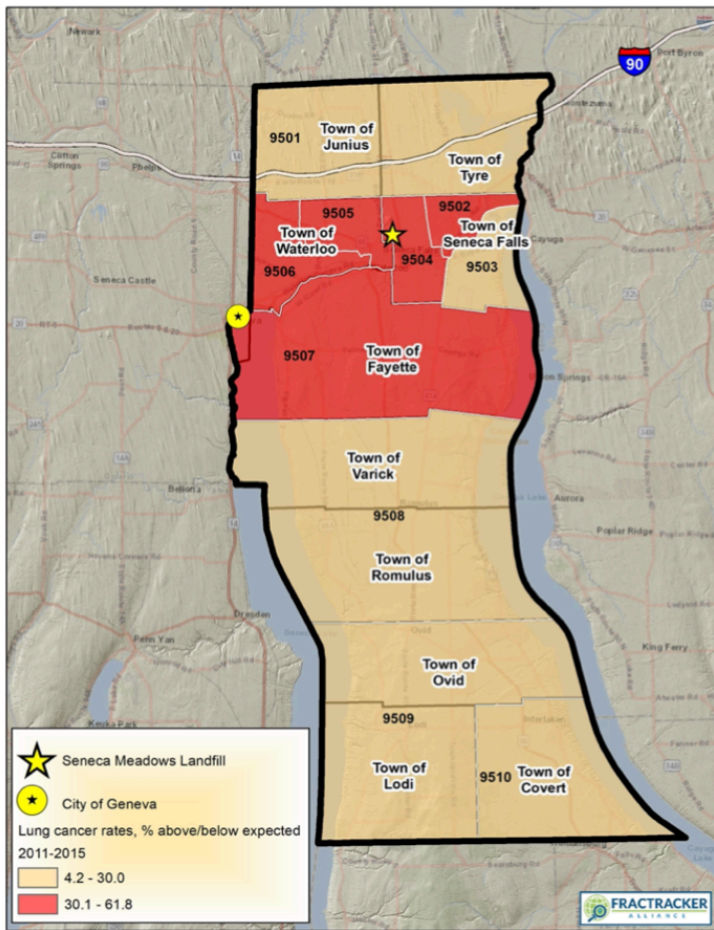


Water Front- Peter Mantius

Environmental politics in New York's Finger Lakes

Seneca Meadows-Funded Report Challenging WaterFront Article on Lung Cancer Rates Cherry-Picks Data, Bungles Facts

[Peter Mantius](#) / [November 4, 2024](#)~~[November 6, 2024](#)~~ / [Uncategorized](#)



A recent report funded by Seneca Meadows found no evidence that the landfill contributed to high rates of lung cancer nearby. The authors mischaracterized an article in WaterFront and incorrectly claimed it had relied on “zip code” data. In fact, 4 of Seneca County’s 10 census tracts had unexpectedly elevated rates of lung cancer in 2011-2015 and 2013-2017, according to DOH data.

Lung Cancer by Seneca County Census Tract

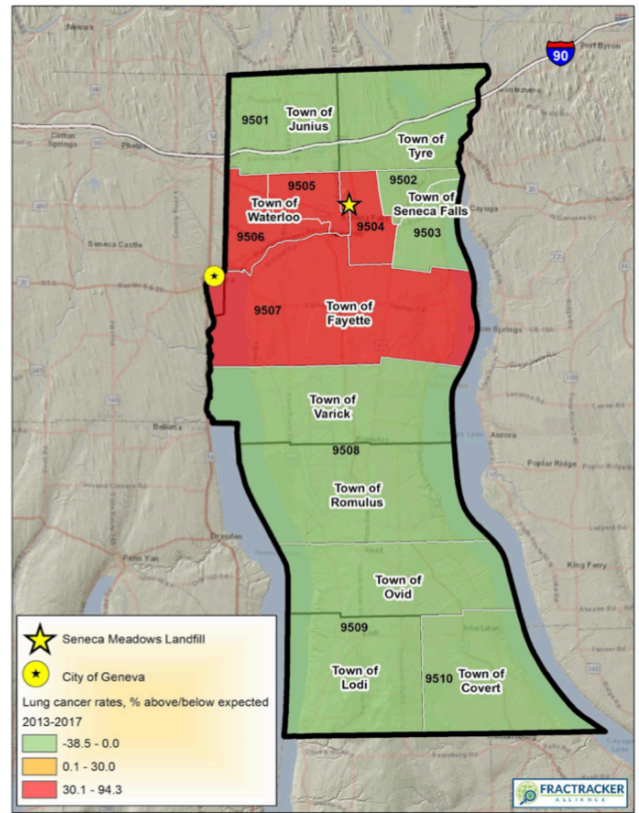
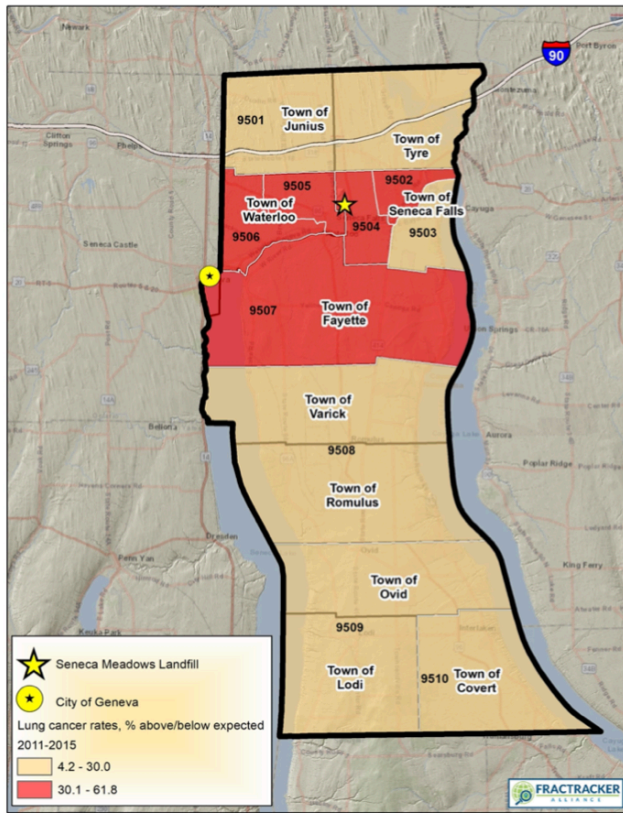
Census Tract Number	Actual Cases/Expected Cases 2011-2015	Actual Cases/Expected Cases 2013-2017
9501	123.6%	90.0%
9502	136.4%	80.0%
9503	104.2%	67.5%
9504	136.0%	163.1%
9505	145.6%	134.9%
9506	143.9%	194.3%
9507	161.8%	137.8%
9508	108.4%	96.8%
9509	105.6%	98.4%
9510	107.8%	69.0%

SENECA FALLS, Nov. 3, 2024 — In an effort to defuse an issue that could interfere with Seneca Meadows Inc.’s bid to win state approval for a major expansion, the landfill’s manager is touting a recent report that dismisses SMI’s potential role in the community’s elevated rates of lung cancer.

The report
(<https://>)

waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/smicancerstudy.pdf), paid for by Seneca Meadows and written by a pair of former waste industry executives,

conclude that there is “no evidence the landfill contributes to the lung cancer incidence in its vicinity.”



A recent report funded by Seneca Meadows found no evidence that the landfill contributed to high rates of lung cancer nearby. The authors mischaracterized an article in WaterFront and incorrectly claimed it had relied on “zip code” data. In fact, 4 of Seneca County’s 10 census tracts had unexpectedly elevated rates of lung cancer in 2011-2015 and 2013-2017, according to DOH data.

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And although the landfill’s air emissions “yield occasional odors,” the report says, “odor does not cause lung cancer.” Furthermore, no chemical releases from the landfill contribute to exposure levels that can cause health problems, and therefore, the report concludes, “without exposure, there can be no risk.”

Kyle Black, the landfill manager, issued a [press release](https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/kylepressrelease.pdf) (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/kylepressrelease.pdf>) that encourages interested parties to review the document “to become more familiar with the facts.”

But the SMI-funded report is wobbly on key facts, and it cherry-picks data that support its conclusions and avoids data that doesn’t.

The former waste industry executives, [Rosanne McTyre](https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/mctyrepdf.pdf) (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/mctyrepdf.pdf>) and [Dr. Ben Hoffman](https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/hoffmanpdf.pdf) (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/hoffmanpdf.pdf>), purport to refute a [June 28, 2023 article](https://waterfrontonline.blog/2023/06/28/seneca-meadows-nys-largest-landfill-sits-in-a-disadvantaged-area-with-high-lung-cancer-rates-is-that-a-problem/) (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/2023/06/28/seneca-meadows-nys-largest-landfill-sits-in-a-disadvantaged-area-with-high-lung-cancer-rates-is-that-a-problem/>), posted on WaterFront and [republished by FingerLakes1](https://www.fingerlakes1.com/2023/06/28/new-yorks-largest-landfill-sits-in-disadvantaged-area-with-high-lung-cancer-rates-is-that-a-problem/) (<https://www.fingerlakes1.com/2023/06/28/new-yorks-largest-landfill-sits-in-disadvantaged-area-with-high-lung-cancer-rates-is-that-a-problem/>), which ignited the lung cancer issue.

Since then the state Department of Environmental Conservation has been weighing the lung cancer question as part of its review of [SMI's application for a permit to expand](https://senecameadows.com/valley-infill-application/) (<https://senecameadows.com/valley-infill-application/>) and operate through 2040. If it's denied, the state's largest landfill would have to permanently close in December 2025.



Rosanne McTyre

The state Department of Health is currently preparing its own analysis of lung cancer cases near the SMI and has said it is due to be released soon.

Meanwhile, a [lawsuit](https://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/nyscef/ViewDocument?docIndex=/FSeO_PLUS_so7XIVeff6cfNfAA==) (https://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/nyscef/ViewDocument?docIndex=/FSeO_PLUS_so7XIVeff6cfNfAA==) against Seneca Meadows and the DEC alleges that the DOH has identified a “lung cancer cluster in the vicinity of the

landfill that cannot be attributed to typical cancer causation factors, e.g., statistics regarding cigarette smoking and/or radon exposure.”

Last week local residents teamed with the Environmental Health Project to install [air monitoring equipment](https://www.google.com/search?q=youtube+air+monitors+seneca+falls&oq=youtube+air+monitors+seneca+falls&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQRRhA0gEINzc3NWowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:fd39523f,vid:7LdaL5UNWmw,st:0) (https://www.google.com/search?q=youtube+air+monitors+seneca+falls&oq=youtube+air+monitors+seneca+falls&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQRRhA0gEINzc3NWowajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:fd39523f,vid:7LdaL5UNWmw,st:0) at several sites around the landfill to monitor its emissions.

Last summer, WaterFront was first to report that the DOH had characterized an area that includes the landfill as a “lung cancer cluster LU-H-17” based on data from 2011-2015.

The article also noted that according to the DOH, several census tracts around the landfill had elevated rates of lung cancer, compared to statistical expectations, for both 2011-2015 and 2013-2017.



Dr. Ben Hoffman

For the census tract that includes the landfill — 9504, a state-designated disadvantaged community — actual cases of lung cancer exceeded statistical expectations by 36 percent in 2011-2015 and by 63 percent in 2013-2017.

McTyre and Hoffman declined to address that data, which is now the heart of the lung cancer controversy in Seneca Falls. They justified the decision to sidestep by claiming the data could not be verified, and then they muffed a key fact.

The DOH has not published updated lung cancer clusters since the one shown above, which is based on data from 2011-2015. The agency has also stopped posting on its website lung cancer statistics by census tract.

Taking aim at the author of the article that first raised

questions about lung cancer rates, they wrote (incorrectly):

“Peter Mantius reviewed the NYSDOH cancer registry website and determined that Seneca County NY had a lung cancer incidence rate higher than expected and reported it by zip code. None of these data are currently available on the NYSDOH website, thus could not be independently verified.”

WaterFront reported DOH data by census tract, not by zip code. The DOH has never questioned the accuracy of that reporting, so MyTyre and Hoffman could have addressed it. They chose not to.

The authors proceeded to broadly misrepresent the June 2023 WaterFront article by falsely stating that it made the following allegation:

“Peter Mantius ... used data that are no longer available from the NYSDOH to make a case for the landfill being the cause of lung cancer in the community.”

In fact, the WaterFront article quoted two health experts who underscored the fact that it is not scientifically defensible to conclude that a higher incidence of lung cancer can be attributed to one particular cause.

For example, Dr. David Carpenter (<https://www.albany.edu/cihs/faculty/david-o-carpenter>), director of the Institute for Health and the Environment at the University of Albany, a branch of SUNY, said: “There can be statistical differences that occur (in lung cancer cases) that aren’t related to any specific cause, like the landfill.” Carpenter said that although Seneca Meadows’ gas emissions “suggest an association” with lung cancer, it would be difficult to prove it.

But Carpenter went on to say that if the census tracts closest to the landfill have much higher rates than those further away, “that’s definitely telling.”

The SMI-funded report steered clear of that crucial point because, it said, “data by zip code” is no longer reported on the DOH website and is therefore unverifiable.

Dr. David Carpenter

The authors of the SMI-funded study — both former employees of the nation’s largest waste company, Waste Management Inc. — also cherry-picked data to back up a dubious conclusion about other potential causes of lung cancer near Seneca Meadows. They wrote:

“Given the high rates of tobacco use and radon levels in Seneca County, factors other than living near a landfill may be the cause of elevated rates in the disadvantaged population in the area of the landfill.”

Smoking is by far the leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S., and radon in homes is generally cited as the No. 2 cause.

The SMI-funded report stated that the smoking prevalence rate in Seneca County is 19.6 percent, well above the state average of 12 percent. The link they provided to the source is no longer active.

WaterFront had reported a similar figure. Its article said DOH estimated that 19.5 percent of residents in Seneca County smoke — higher than 43 counties and lower than 18.

But it also reported a more detailed study of smoking in the Finger Lakes that arrived at sharply different results.

Rochester-based
Common Ground
Health
(<https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp->

<content/uploads/2023/06/fingerlakeshealthsenecacountystudy.pdf>).
pegged the Seneca County smoking rate at 15 percent. That was lower than all but one of the eight counties it studied and below the 16 percent average for the state outside New York City, which has dramatically lower smoking rates. (The state Health Department also reports cancer data on a “NYS, excluding NYC” basis).

While the DOH provides a single number for estimated smokers in Seneca County, Common Ground’s smoking data is far more refined. It breaks down estimated smoking rates by sex, income, disability and cigarettes versus e-

cigarettes.

The SMI-funded report on lung cancer chose to omit Common Ground Health’s data on smoking.

While McTyre and Hoffman relied on DOH data for smoking, they ignored the agency’s data for radon. Instead they cited estimates made by a private company in North Carolina, which were more favorable to their argument.

They reported that the average “indoor” radon level in Seneca County was 3.8 pCi/L, compared to a national average of 1.3 pCi/L, and linked to Air Check Inc., of Mills River, N.C. They didn’t mention that Air-Check reported that New York State’s radon average was 4.2 pCi/L.

By reporting “indoor” rates, Air-Check did not specify whether the measurements were taken on the first floor of homes or in basements, where readings can be 10 times higher.

Meanwhile, McTyre and Hoffman ignored DOH data (https://www.health.data.ny.gov/Health/Radon-Test-Results-By-County-Beginning-1987/8e6u-9695/data_preview) on each New York county's average level of radon on the "first floor" of homes. The Seneca County level was 1.26 pCi/L. That reading fell in the bottom quartile of the state's 62 counties and below eight of 11 counties in the Finger Lakes/Southern Tier region.

In contrast the the SMI-funded report that dubiously claimed that it was a "given" that Seneca County had high smoking and radon rates, the WaterFront article had characterized the county's smoking and radon rates as "unremarkable."

Apart from their factual errors and cherry-picking of data, McTyre and Hoffman did make several valid points in their report.

They correctly noted that hydrogen sulfide (<https://www.cdc.gov/TSP/MMG/MMGDetails.aspx?mmgid=385&toxoid=67#:~:text=Hydrogen%20sulfide%20is%20a%20highly,of%20respiratory%20and%20cardiovascular%20functions.>) (H₂S), a common odorous landfill gas, is not deemed to be a cause of any type of cancer. And although it can cause irritation to the eyes and throat — and be deadly in very high concentrations — it is not considered a serious health risk a levels typically emitted by the landfill.

However, Seneca Meadows constantly emits H₂S, and neighbors of the landfill have complained that H₂S spikes linked to the landfill have rendered their business nearly uninhabitable (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/2022/10/18/leach-ate-from-seneca-meadows-blamed-for-sewer-gas-stench-incident-in-may-one-firm-asks-how-dangerous-was-it/>).

Also, the constant presence of landfill H₂S strongly suggests that other potentially harmful gases are also being regularly emitted.

In fact, scientists in Italy who compared more than 240,000 people living near nine landfills around Rome for a 2016 peer reviewed study (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/aaitalianh2sstudy2016.pdf>) chose to use H₂S as a "tracer" or surrogate for other potentially harmful landfill gases.

That study published in the International Journal of Epidemiology found a correlation between H₂S exposure and lung cancer deaths/other respiratory problems. The Italian scientists never asserted that the H₂S itself caused excess lung cancer. Rather, they argued that it merely exposed the presence of other chemical emissions that apparently did harm health.

The SMI-funded report that landfill manager Black touted also correctly pointed to the limited usefulness of the data from the DOH's New York Cancer Registry.

For example, it is never proper to use that DOH data to assign a specific cause for a case of lung cancer, even in areas with a high number of cancer cases or cancer deaths.

The agency's lung cancer data is based on records of where a person lived at the time of their diagnosis. That can leave the impression that something related to that location must be causing the cancer. But lung cancer takes five to 40 years to develop, and people change jobs and move.

The DOH stresses that the causes of cancer tend to have more to do with personal histories, genetics and lifestyles than environmental causes such as landfill gases. And much of the most relevant cancer case information is contained in confidential HIPAA-protected medical records.

Cancer registries merely provide data that can be used to develop hypotheses based on statistical patterns.

Carpenter of SUNY-Albany did not respond to an email requesting comment on the SMI-funded report and his comment to WaterFront that high lung cancer counts in census tracts near Seneca Meadows was "definitely telling."

McTyre,
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medical officer of Waste Management from 2000 to 2010. Reached by phone at his home in Texas Sunday afternoon, he said he did not have time to respond to questions.

When asked to provide his email address so that WaterFront could send him written questions, he said that he would. But he did not follow through and provide an email address.

Waste Management owns the High Acres landfill, New York's second largest landfill located about 35 miles northwest of Seneca Meadows, which is owned by Waste Connections Inc., the nation's third largest waste company.

Both waste industry giants are defendants in lawsuits over intense odors emitted by their New York landfills.

In August, a mid-level state appeals court dismissed (<https://waterfrontonline.blog/2024/08/06/in-a-victory-for-giant-landfills-and-dec-appeals-court-rejects-broad-application-of-green-amendment-right-to-clean-air/>) the suit involving High Acres, but an appeal to New York's highest court is expected.

Yvonne Taylor

The lawsuit against Seneca Meadows, brought by [Seneca Lake Guardian](https://senecalakeguardian.org/) (<https://senecalakeguardian.org/>) and others, is pending in the Supreme Court of Albany County.

Yvonne Taylor, co-founder of SLG, said her group is preparing a rebuttal to the SMI-funded report by McTyre and Hoffman. “You can pay people to saying anything,” Taylor said. “SMI will point to this study for a long time.”

Barbara Reese, a leader in the push for air monitoring around the landfill, said:

Barb Reese

“We’re just trying measure what’s around us to see if there’s something that as a community we should be doing to protect our health.”

Published by Peter Mantius

I am a journalist who lives in Watkins Glen, NY. I write about the environment and politics on my website, Waterfrontonline.blog. For more detail on my background, see the "Peter's Bio" section on that site. [View all posts by Peter Mantius](#)

1 Comment

1.

carl@geupel.org says: [November 5, 2024 at 2:47 am](#)

Way to hit'em back, Peter. C a r l G e u p e l Carl@Geupel.org 1 . 413 . 835 . 1943

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