

West Cayuga Island

September 2026 Site Investigation Update



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and New York State Department of Health (DOH) are conducting an investigation into the historic placement of fill on the western end of Cayuga Island in Niagara Falls to ensure the protection of public health and the environment.

Recent Activities at Cayuga Island

DEC is investigating elevated levels of mercury, pesticides, and other contaminants discovered in the West Rivershore Drive right-of-way on Cayuga Island in the city of Niagara Falls. DEC is investigating the type and extent of potential contaminants in the surface soil, sub-slab soil vapor, indoor air, and sump water, where applicable.

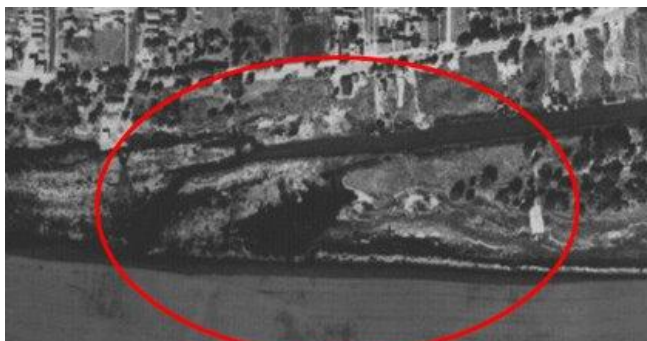
In February 2026, DEC initiated outreach to potentially impacted property owners on the westernmost tip of Cayuga Island to participate in the State's sampling efforts. DEC is completing soil, sub-slab soil vapor, indoor air, and sump water sampling at several properties where owners have provided voluntary access. Results of the sampling were provided directly to the property owners and property-specific plans to address any contamination needing mitigation are underway.

Based on the findings from participating properties to date, which confirmed some impacts to indoor air and soil, DEC and DOH are beginning a second phase of investigations. Offers will be extended to sample certain additional properties along West Rivershore Drive to provide more detail on the scope of impacts from the historic fill activities that created the western tip of the island decades ago.

DEC staff will directly reach out to property owners of the locations of interest to offer soil, indoor air quality, and sump water testing. All work associated with a property investigation, any recommended mitigation, cleanup, and restoration of properties to pre-cleanup conditions will be completed at no cost to the homeowner.

Background

The western end of Cayuga Island was extended in the early 1900s and again between 1958 and 1962 using fill that included industrial material. In 1992 and 1993, DEC, in cooperation with DOH, conducted site assessments and sampling. These assessments identified sporadic contamination of mercury, pesticides, and other contaminants in surface and subsurface soils. Notices detailing the contaminant levels were provided to each property owner. Working with DOH, property owners were notified that they should contact DEC or DOH if they were going to be performing ground-intrusive work on their properties. The site was delisted from the State's registry of Inactive Hazardous Waste Disposal Sites in 1995.



1927 aerial photo of western tip of Cayuga Island



Current aerial photo of western tip of Cayuga Island

In 2025, soil data collected during utility work in the West Rivershore Drive right of way on the western tip of Cayuga Island demonstrated the presence of contaminated fill. Subsurface soil samples submitted to DEC had elevated levels of several contaminants related to industrial material. DEC followed up by collecting soil samples in the West Rivershore right of way. DEC received results in early December that were consistent with historical data and showed exceedances of DEC screening levels in residential settings for several contaminants. Based on this new information, the historic use of fill in creating Cayuga Island, and revised requirements for addressing contamination, DEC and DOH began a phased investigation of private properties to assess the potential for legacy contamination to affect soil and indoor air quality in the area.

Sampling Investigation

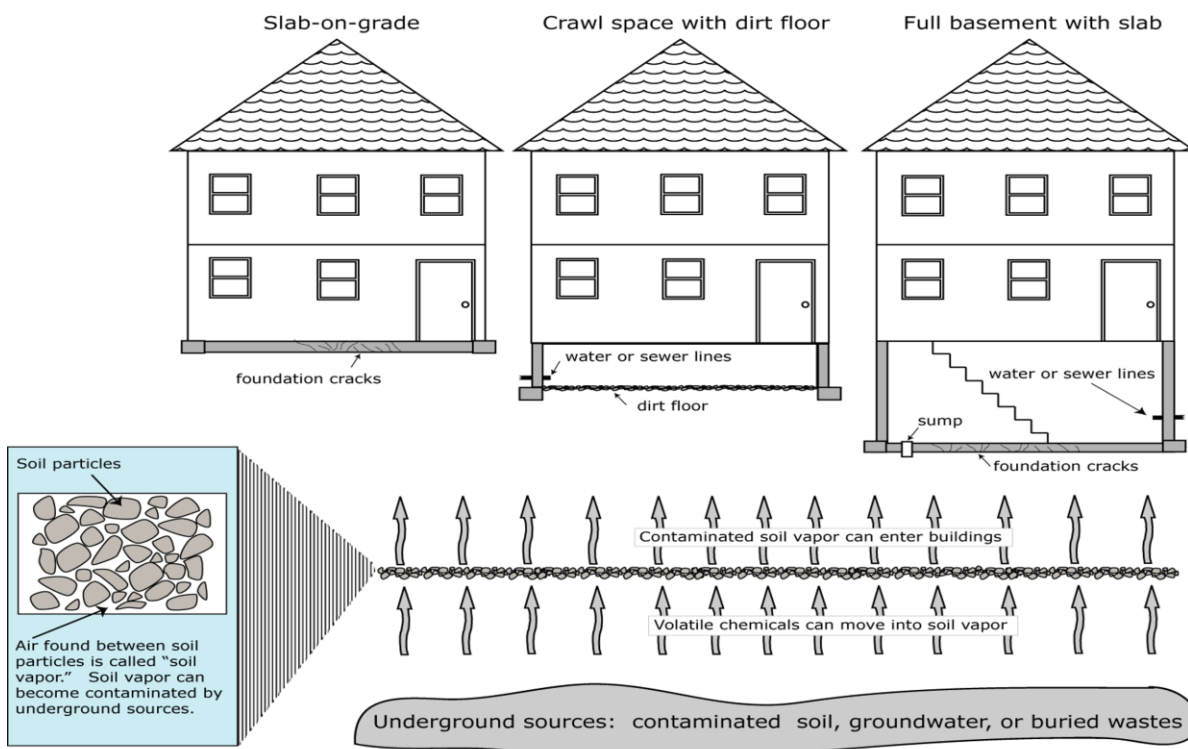
DEC and DOH developed a sampling plan for western Cayuga Island properties that will evaluate whether contaminants of potential concern are present at each property. This investigation will help inform any additional steps needed to address contaminants and ensure the full protection of the Cayuga Island community. DEC's sampling plan includes three components:

- Collecting and testing surface soil samples from each property by hand digging or augering;
- Collecting and testing sub-slab soil vapor and indoor air samples to determine if chemicals underground are entering the indoor air of a building through the basement, crawlspace, or slab – a process called soil vapor intrusion; and
- Collecting and testing sump water samples from homes with sumps.

WHAT IS SOIL VAPOR INTRUSION?

Soil vapor intrusion is a process by which chemicals in the ground can enter the indoor air of a building through the basement, crawlspace, or slab, as depicted in the graphic below.

DEC and DOH will then closely review the results and determine that next steps may be needed to ensure potential exposure concerns are addressed.



Arranging for Sampling

DEC and DOH are seeking the cooperation of property owners to participate in the State's sampling efforts to delineate the type and extent of potential contaminants in the community.

DEC will also accommodate any property owners within the investigation area who were previously offered sampling and have not yet arranged for the investigation. Please reach out to the DEC contact information below to provide access and schedule activities.

DEC and DOH are committed to continuing to work with the Cayuga Island community throughout the investigation and clean up.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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