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DEQ continues investigation of landfill gases near Beau Coast

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Beau Coast residents meet to discuss methane threat

BEAUFORT — The Beaufort Refuse Dump on Freedom Park Road closed 50 years ago, but methane gas generated by the historic site is raising new alarms for nearby homeowners and state regulators. Though DEQ identified the site's potential for gas production in 2006, recent testing suggests landfill vapors may now be migrating into adjacent residential neighborhoods built in the years since.

Officials with DEQ's Division of Waste Management (DWM) met last week with nearly 50 community members and town leaders in Beaufort to address soil-gas readings collected near homes on Sea Hawk Street and Great Egret Way, just beyond the historic landfill site.

Site Name	Site Town	Site Rank*	2025 Risk Score	2026 Risk Score**
Otway Community Refuse Dump	Otway	67	201	247
Atlantic Refuse Dump	Atlantic	205	120	227
Emerald Isle Dump	Emerald Isle	263	105	196 ↑
Raynor Garbage Disposal Dump	Bogue	331	72	163 ↑
Winston Hill Landfill, Atlantic	Atlantic	335	68	160 ↑
Morehead City Refuse Dump	Morehead City	439	28	121 ↑
Harkers Island Refuse Dump	Harkers Island	607	3	109 ↑
Stacy Refuse Dump	Stacy	283	102	107 ↓
Beaufort Refuse Dump	Beaufort	431	28	79 ↑
Marshallberg Dump	Marshallberg	248	114	64 ↓
Cape Carteret Dump	Cape Carteret	371	54	55 ↓
Carteret County Landfill, Mount Russel	Newport	403	50	53 ↓
Mill Creek Refuse Dump	Newport	624	0	0
Carteret County Landfill	Newport	N/A	N/A	Not listed

*Site ranks are out of 629 landfills scored and ranked in NCDEQ's Pre-Regulatory Landfill Program. These ranks are based on scores calculated in April 2025. Lower rank numbers indicate higher risk landfills.

** Red = 2026 Risk score increased by 100 points or more, Orange = 2026 Risk score increased by 50 to 100 points since 2025, Yellow = Risk score increased by 1 to 49 points, Green = Risk score decreased by 0 to 50 points, Blue = Risk Score decreased by 50 to 100 points. Arrows indicate change in risk score relative to the 14 Carteret County sites; no arrow means no change in relative rank.

Beaufort dump risk score triples as state probes gas migration concerns

The meeting follows a March 19 remedial vapor sampling report from engineering firm CDM Smith, Inc. Soil-gas samples, or measurements of vapors between soil, collected from three to four feet underground in December 2025 and January 2026 showed methane concentrations as high as 53.2% per volume near 427 Sea Hawk Street and 44.7% per near 411 Sea Hawk Street. Methane is considered explosive in air at concentrations between 5% and 15% by volume. Hydrogen sulfide was also detected near 427 Sea Hawk Street at levels exceeding safe limits for soil beneath a home, though the report notes the amount was non-carcinogenic.

Katherine Lucas, public information officer for the Division of Waste Management, explained in an email to the News-Times that underground readings do not mean methane has entered homes. In fact, indoor testing at 411 Sea Hawk Street in December detected no methane or hydrogen sulfide in the home, though state contractors installed two free methane detectors inside as a precaution. Officials have been unable to access 427 Sea Hawk Street for further soil and indoor vapor sampling.

However, officials say broader testing is necessary to determine if landfill gases are migrating from the former landfill into residential structures or originating from natural coastal marsh soils.

To conduct testing, DEQ requested property access to 31 homes in the area. As of last week, only nine had granted access, according to Project Manager Sean Gallagher, though state records show officials delivered 25 follow-up requests to non-respondents on Aug. 10.

"We're asking for everybody's cooperation to help us have the most effective strategy possible," said William "Billy" Meyer, Superfund section chief for the division. "The larger data set and the more information we have, the better we can implement solutions."

If testing reveals indoor risks, DEQ will install vapor mitigation systems and indoor detectors at no cost to property owners. Delonda Alexander, special remediation branch head, said contractor testing will begin in mid-September regardless of how many access agreements are returned.

During the meeting, several residents expressed concern that public environmental data could depress property values or complicate home resales.

State officials clarified that their authority is strictly environmental, directing residents to a DEQ fact sheet. The document states that residual contamination may have little impact on market value if other factors are favorable, and notes that many lending institutions routinely refinance or issue mortgages on impacted properties.

Getting the data is key to understanding the extent of the problem and, by extension, remedying it, officials at the meeting underlined.

Meyer noted that refusing access prevents the state from verifying a specific parcel's safety or installing protective equipment. "If your concern is your property value and you don't want us to take a sample on your property, then that's something that prevents us from getting data from your property," he explained.

Other residents questioned whether Beau Coast officials, property developers with Preston Development Company and the home builders at Streamline Developers knowingly built homes near a hazard.

"It sounds like we were set up for failure in that respect," one attendee asserted.

Investigation of the site's contamination started as early as 2002. Early environmental site assessments in 2006 and 2007 by engineering firm Withers & Ravenel did not detect any underground methane on the former landfill site or in surrounding areas where Beau Coast homes now sit.

Consultants recommended that any development of property surrounding the Beaufort Refuse Dump include buffers for potential methane gas migration and advised against purchasing the former landfill parcel due to future liability and potential cleanup costs.

Developers appear to have adhered to other recommendations put forth, that they subdivide the landfill parcel between multiple LLCs to reduce the companies' individual liability and that they consider a Brownfield's agreement to remediate the site.

Property records show the former dump site was placed under a state Brownfields agreement in June 2012, restricting its use to green space and potential walking trails. The parcel is owned by Buried Treasure Inc., while adjacent land is held by Blue Treasure LLC—both entities linked to Beau Coast developers.

In an email statement to the News-Times, a spokesperson for Blue Treasure LLC said the company supports DEQ's continued evaluation of potentially affected properties and remains committed to resident safety.

"We appreciate NCDEQ's careful, science-based approach to evaluating these conditions and believe it is important to allow NCDEQ's review to proceed before drawing conclusions about the source, extent, or significance of the conditions being evaluated," they said. "We will continue to cooperate with NCDEQ and the Town of Beaufort and will remain engaged as additional information becomes available."

Despite objections to DEQ's efforts, other residents present at the meeting seemed willing to accommodate access after receiving more information.

The town of Beaufort encouraged property owners who received notices to arrange access for DEQ in a recent press release on the matter. In fact, one of the town's sitting commissioners present at the meeting, Dexter Matthews, previously served as the Director of the Division of Waste Management when the PRLF Program was established.

DEQ Officials ultimately encouraged residents to reach out to the Division for more information. Additional meetings will be held in the future as the investigation continues.