



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

February 18, 2020

Joseph Kardash, Superintendent
Meghan Heimroth, CPA
Board of Education Members
Rensselaer City School District
25 Van Rensselaer Drive
Rensselaer, New York 12144

Dear Mr. Kardash, Ms. Heimroth and the Rensselaer School District Board Members:

This letter is in response to your December 18, 2019 letter to New York State Commissioner of Health, Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D., regarding the ongoing air quality concerns with the Dunn landfill, and your request that the New York State Department of Health (Department) review of indoor air-quality concerns at the school.

Your letter references recent instances when hydrogen sulfide odors were detected inside the school, a condition associated in your letter with an "erosion" at the landfill.

We agree that hydrogen sulfide odors entering the school are concerning and can be quite disruptive. Recently, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) asked the Department to review the results of outdoor air monitors that it had installed outside the school buildings. Our Department reviewed the air quality data and noted that there were several instances of hydrogen sulfide detection which might have produced odors at the school. As a result, we have recommended to DEC that it continue air monitoring and take additional steps to minimize landfill gas emissions.

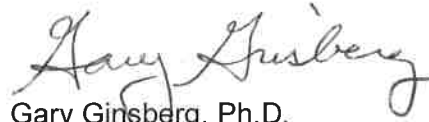
With respect to the potential utility of indoor air sampling within the school, the Department does not currently recommend indoor air quality testing (IAQ) for several reasons. However, if the Rensselaer City School District opts to pursue IAQ testing independently through its own consultant, the Department would provide the following cautions and considerations. Unfortunately, there are very few standards for indoor air contaminants that would apply to the general public at schools and residences. This is due to the various sources of contaminants that can occur within the buildings themselves such as bathrooms, cleaning products, building materials, and art supplies. In addition, conditions are variable and thus results from one point in time do not necessarily reflect other points in time or longer term conditions. Because of this, results of indoor air testing, as requested in your letter, can be challenging to interpret and often don't identify potential sources. As a result of these limitations, the Department focuses on recommending additional actions to assure indoor air quality concerns are mitigated through such measures as moisture control and improved ventilation.

In addition, hydrogen sulfide has a distinctive odor that can be recognized by our noses at very low levels and such odors are often a better indicator of an impact to air quality than IAQ testing. As you acknowledge in the letter, the DEC installed hydrogen sulfide monitors in the community to monitor whether landfill gases are migrating off-site and onto school

grounds. Such evidence of off-site migration is, by itself, sufficient to justify DEC requiring a change to the management of the landfill without any additional sampling of indoor environments.

We do recognize that the odors are unpleasant, and some people could experience short-term reversible symptoms such as headache, nausea or irritation of the eyes or upper airways. The Department will continue to work closely with DEC to assure that the operator implements all required changes to address the outdoor monitoring and management of landfill gases at this site. We stand ready to discuss ongoing concerns and next steps with yourself, members of the Board and the school community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Ginsberg".

Gary Ginsberg, Ph.D.
Director

Center for Environmental Health

cc: K. Goertz, NYS DEC