

# SOMERSET COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

## County Environmental Health Act Program

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT & IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2023

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#### **Purpose & Authority**

The Somerset County Department of Health (SCDOH) was created by the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders in 1992 to provide public health and environmental health services throughout the County. Since that time, SCDOH has provided local environmental compliance and enforcement services on behalf of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), via authority delegated by the County Environmental Health Act (CEHA). Through an annual grant agreement, SCDOH enhances the State's pollution control efforts by providing efficient and holistic responses to local environmental issues. Focus areas have traditionally included core environmental regulations covering water, air, noise, solid waste, and emergency response.

The County's CEHA delegation pursuant to N.J.S.A. 26:3A2-21 authorizes trained SCDOH personnel to perform routine NJDEP-delegated inspections at various facilities, investigate complaints, and to provide public information and education services in matters concerning environmental health. SCDOH gathers evidence of environmental violations as required, pursues enforcement when appropriate, and is authorized to issue civil administrative penalties and convene settlement negotiations that are consistent with NJDEP regulations and policies. An overview of the County Environmental Health Act is available at: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/enforcement/ceha.html>

The Somerset County Department of Health also serves as the primary public health agency for the 9 municipalities of Bedminster, Far Hills, Franklin, Manville, North Plainfield, Raritan, Bound Brook, South Bound Brook and Somerville. SCDOH ensures residents of these towns receive quality public health services including childhood immunizations, health education, and compliance monitoring of restaurants, recreational bathing areas, wells & septic systems. Residents within the other 12 municipalities of the County are served by 6 distinct local health agencies. Further, SCDOH serves as the central agency for the County's Local Information Network Communications System (LINCS), the State-designated coordinating agency for County-wide Public Health Emergency Preparedness, and has established a Governmental Public Health Partnership (GPHP) to support and guide the development of environmental and public health services within the County.

This report has been developed to summarize recent CEHA inspection and enforcement activities, as well as to highlight the Department's goals for services that will improve our efforts to increase environmental quality for the residents of Somerset County. CEHA program inspection data in this report is based upon the fiscal year 2023 grant cycle, running from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

## Community Background

Somerset County is located in the heart of central New Jersey and occupies an area of 305.5 square miles, with a diverse mix of urban and suburban neighborhoods and rural countrysides. Established in 1688, the County is one of the oldest in America and historic sites are found in virtually all of its 21 municipalities. Census estimates in 2020 show 345,361 residents live in Somerset County. Population growth through 2030 is expected to grow steadily, with an increase in the senior citizen population as well as increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Employment is projected to grow at a pace of 1% per year on average, with growth focused on administrative and waste services, construction, health care and social assistance.

Smart growth and preserving open space are important issues to County residents. The County has preserved over 8,200 acres of farmland, and the Somerset County Park Commission maintains over 14,000 acres of open space including parks, golf courses, hiking and bicycling trails, picnic areas, an Environmental Education Center and the County Fairgrounds. Transportation assets include an extensive network of roadways, rail and bus services, as well as pedestrian and biking amenities, however public transportation represents a small share of overall commuting. Encouraging communities designed for walking and development near transit stops can reduce traffic while improving public health and environmental quality.

Somerset County residents enjoy a relatively low rate of poverty and relatively high rates of education and homeownership. The 2021 per capita income was approximately \$61,805, with a median household income of approximately \$121,695. Somerset County attracts and retains well-known corporations including pharmaceutical and life sciences companies. The County's landscapes, historic sites, educational facilities, recreation opportunities, and outstanding business and industry all make Somerset County a desirable location to live and work. Additional demographic information and trends are available at: <http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/government/public-works/planning/data-reports>

## **Personnel and Equipment**

The Somerset County Department of Health maintains a full-time staff of 28 professionals consisting of: Director of Public Health/Health Officer, Deputy Director, Epidemiologist, Preparedness Coordinator, Nursing Coordinator, Community Health Nurse/MRC Coordinator, COVID Coordinator, LINCS COVID Social Support Coordinator, two Health Educators, an Environmental Health Coordinator, a Consumer health Coordinator, two Senior Registered Environmental Health Specialists, five Registered Environmental Health Specialists and 11 total employees with the REHS license, three CEHA Public Health Inspectors, a LINCS/PHENS Coordinator, a Lead Inspector, a Nurse/Case Manager, a Regional Chronic Disease Control Health Coordinator (RCDC), a Community Health Worker, a Special Projects Coordinator, a Business Manager and three full-time Administrative Assistants. Numerous staff positions are currently grant-funded by either the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) or the NJDEP, while others are funded via municipal contracts within our local public health service area. SCDOH also oversees the contractual grant administration for the Somerset County Medical Reserve Corp, the Regional Chronic Disease Coalition, and the Somerset County Chest Clinic.

SCDOH inspectors utilize equipment that includes laptop computers, cellular enabled tablets, portable radios and cell phones with photo and video camera capabilities, pH meters, weather monitoring equipment and PID meters for air inspections, certified noise meters, GPS units and supporting software. Several vehicles are equipped with mobile radios and inspectors are provided appropriate personal protective equipment. All professional staff are available to respond to public health and environmental emergencies on a 24/7/365 basis.

## Core NJDEP-delegated CEHA Program Activities

### Clean Air

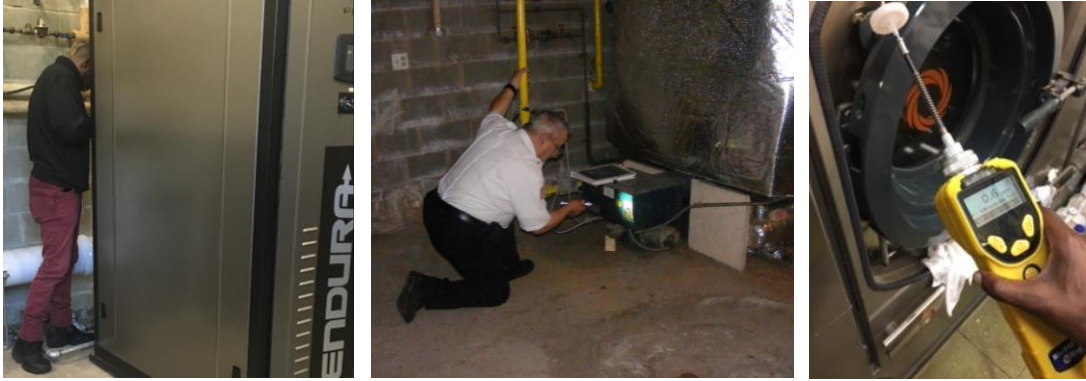
The Somerset County Department of Health is committed to reducing the impact of air pollution in Somerset County. Our goal is to ensure that air throughout the County is healthful to breathe and that air pollutants will not damage our forests, land, water bodies, or properties. The NJDEP monitors air quality indirectly for Somerset County, through sampling stations surrounding the County, with several located in Mercer, Union, Middlesex and Morris Counties, and one in Hunterdon County. Pollutants monitored include carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ground level ozone, particulates, and sulfur dioxide. Further information and reports on historical trends in air quality can be found at <http://www.njaginow.net/>. Overall, maximum pollutant concentrations have declined steadily and significantly since 1967. However, ground level ozone and particulate pollution remain a concern in New Jersey. It would be beneficial for Somerset County to install a permeant air monitoring station. CEHA has worked in FY21 to get interested towns in contact with the appropriate personnel at NJDEP to begin this process.

Ground level ozone (sometimes called smog) is formed as a by-product of volatile organic chemicals and nitrous oxides emitted from motor vehicle exhaust, industrial facilities and gasoline vapors. Ozone is implicated in health issues such as asthma and increased susceptibility to respiratory illnesses, to environmental damage including reduced crop yields and tree leaf damage. SCDOH works closely with NJDEP initiatives to reduce emissions wherever possible, such as conducting ongoing idling surveillance and focusing inspection efforts to curtail the routine testing or maintenance of emergency generators on days when unhealthy air is forecasted.

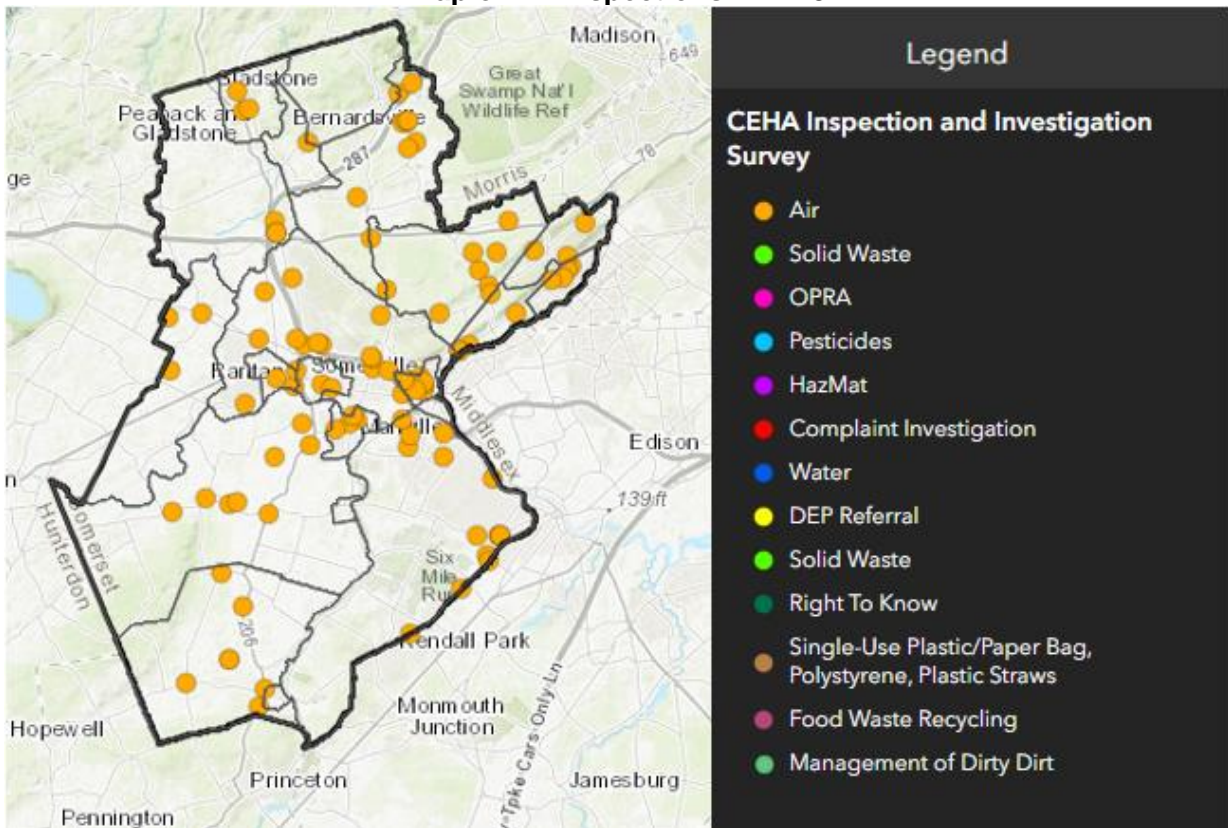
During fiscal year 2023, inspectors conducted 91 routine NJDEP-delegated inspections and responded to 11 air pollution complaints and 88 referrals. The facilities inspected included dry cleaners, auto body shops, and business locations containing regulated boilers and/or emergency generators. Complaints and referrals include odor, noise, and visible emissions, idling investigations.

Fiscal years 2021, 2022, and 2023 saw a steady increase in after-hour complaints for odor and noise in the spring, summer and fall, and increased after-hours idling complaints in the winter and spring. In fiscal year 2023, we assigned wind and noise meters to inspectors vehicles to reduce the response time and the investigate complaints in a more timely manner. We also purchased and utilized a noise meter that displays impulse and continuous noise readings simultaneously, as we saw increased noise complaints that were prospectively on the line between impulse and continuous sounds. This new meter allowed us to ensure we were getting the right readings at the right time, and erased the potential need to perform multiple investigations for the same source.

CEHA staff will continue routine compliance evaluations at these facilities, and initiate enforcement action where indicated. Staff will promptly respond to NJDEP referrals and citizen complaints of odors, dust, open burning, and other sources of particulate emissions. Routine idling enforcement in problem areas will be continued as staff availability allows. Staff will maintain certifications in Visible Emissions, Noise, and Odor Field Enforcement.



Map of Air Inspections – FY23





## **Clean Water**

Somerset County residents are concerned about having sufficient quantities of clean ground and surface water for consumption and recreational purposes. Drinking water sources are varied throughout the County, with urban and suburban communities utilizing public community water supplies and the vast majority of rural areas relying on private well water.

The Somerset County Department of Health plays an active role in the oversight and regulation of public non-community (“PNC”) water sources. Any drinking water well which has the potential to serve 25 or more persons, for at least 60 days in a calendar year, falls under the scope of the CEHA program, and these systems are required to perform various levels of water quality analyses each year to ensure a safe drinking water supply.

During fiscal year 2023, 32 routine PNC well inspections were conducted. The vast majority of facilities were found to be in substantial compliance with Safe Drinking Water Act. In the event regular well testing is not conducted, SCDOH pursues immediate enforcement of the Safe Drinking Water Act. When water quality standards are not met, SCDOH ensures that appropriate public notification is provided and corrective measures are implemented. Outreach to the regulated community regarding maintenance and upkeep of their water treatment and distribution systems is provided on an ongoing basis. Educational involvement by SCDOH with PNC water suppliers is vital to ensure safe and clean drinking water is provided, especially with ever changing treatment technology and regulations.

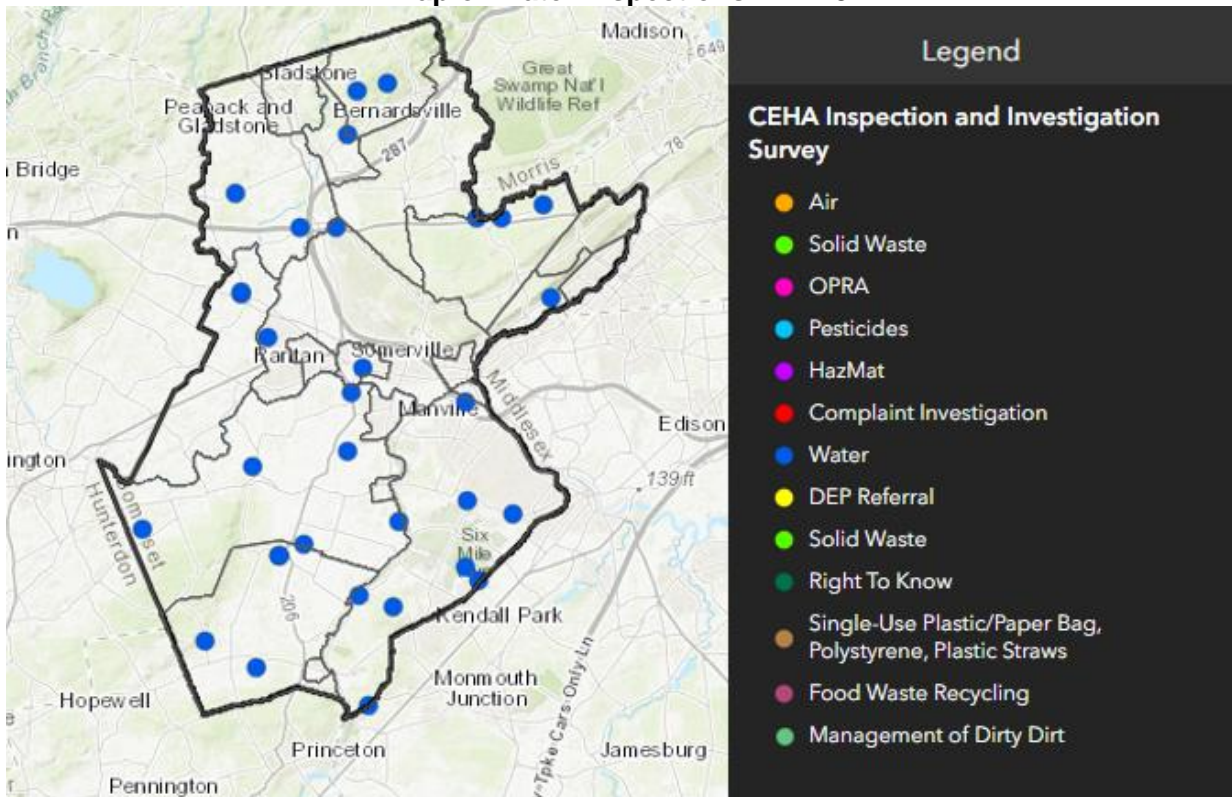
Surface water quality is also an important issue in Somerset County and SCDOH is committed to ensuring that rivers, lakes and streams will be fishable, swimmable and support healthy ecosystems. During the 2023 fiscal year, Somerset County CEHA staff responded to 4 water pollution complaint, and 7 water pollution referrals. Somerset County has an excellent supply of water in the region, since the major reservoir system of New Jersey, Round Valley and Spruce Run, feeds directly into the Raritan River, which traverses Somerset County. Additionally, the Delaware and Raritan Canal traverse the southern portion of the County. From 2005 - 2011, and during 2013, SCDOH assisted the NJDEP in ambient surface water monitoring. Additional information on surface water quality is available at: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/wms/bears/swqs.htm>

Over the years, SCDOH has worked cooperatively with NJDEP, municipal agencies, watershed associations, the water supply authority, the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District and the Somerset County Division of Mosquito Control to identify illegal discharges, and monitor the quality of the County’s rivers and streams. Through this and other efforts, the CEHA program has increased its focus on prevention and enforcement of violations of the Water Pollution Control Act. By working in conjunction with Local and County Emergency Management officials, investigations of significant environmental releases are conducted to determine if a responsible party has violated these regulations.

An opportunity for growth of this program area is to offer drinking water test kits to residents to allow their water to be tested and ensure it is safe, especially after events such as the remnants of tropical storm Ida and growing concerns of PFAS or PFOA contaminants. For FY24, we are looking to partner with the Consumer Health division of SCDOH to offer drinking water testing to residents.



### Map of Water Inspections – FY23



## **Solid Waste & Recycling**

The Somerset County Department of Health is committed to ensuring an environment free from illegal dumping and unsafe solid waste transportation. The solid waste program is therefore an important and significant part of the CEHA program. During fiscal year 2023, staff conducted 39 routine inspections at solid waste and recycling centers, described below. CEHA staff also conducted field investigations, which included 45 compliance evaluations of garbage haulers, 41 solid waste container inspections, 13 generator recycling compliance inspections, and responses to 22 complaints and solid waste incident referrals such as of illegal dumping or improperly stored materials or tires, which contribute to mosquito-borne diseases.

Compliance evaluations of facilities include one privately owned garbage transfer station and intermodal facility, seven major recycling centers, numerous small-scale recycling operations, and municipal waste collection sites. Staff routinely works with local law enforcement during truck checks at the transfer station to ensure DMV safety requirements are being met, while CEHA staff evaluates compliance with NJDEP regulations.

The CEHA program also works collaboratively with the County and Municipal Recycling Coordinators to promote recycling within the business community. The County of Somerset Public Works Department provides curb-side recycling pick-up for residents and the County's Office of Solid Waste Management sponsors five household hazardous waste days annually. The household hazardous waste day program allows residents a legal and cost-free way to dispose of unwanted household items that cannot be disposed of in the regular trash. These events tend to generate approximately 46 tons of waste. Common items collected are pesticides, antifreeze and other vehicle maintenance related fluids, batteries, fluorescent lights, cleaning supplies, mercury, helium and propane tanks, pool chemicals, and other hazardous chemicals. These events are also an opportunity to collect the medications prescription or over-the-counter, to be properly disposed of by the Somerset County Sheriff's Office. Household Hazardous Waste Days provide Somerset County CEHA staff an opportunity to educate and assist the public in how to properly dispose of unaccepted materials (such as tires and electronics) and to answer other related environmental health questions or concerns.

In FY23, SCDOH observed a pattern of increased solid waste & illegal dumping complaints received during the spring season, moving forward additional compliance inspections will be completed in the fall and winter to minimize spring non-compliance. SCDOH CEHA also received increased complaints regarding "dirty dirt" (potentially contaminated fill material) being used and illegally dumped in residential construction projects throughout the county. SCDOH CEHA conducted 3 inspections of soil processors to determine compliance with NJDEP permitting requirements for soil transportation and clean fill regulatory standards.

In a state-wide effort to minimize plastic waste, NJDEP enacted a ban of single-use plastics provided by retail establishments that went into effect May 4, 2022. SCDOH CEHA served as the local enforcement agency of this ban starting in FY23. SCDOH CEHA conducted 50 inspections of retail establishments to ensure single use plastic bags were not provided and plastic straws were available only upon request. Continued education and outreach regarding the new regulations will be needed to bring all retail establishments in the county to compliance.

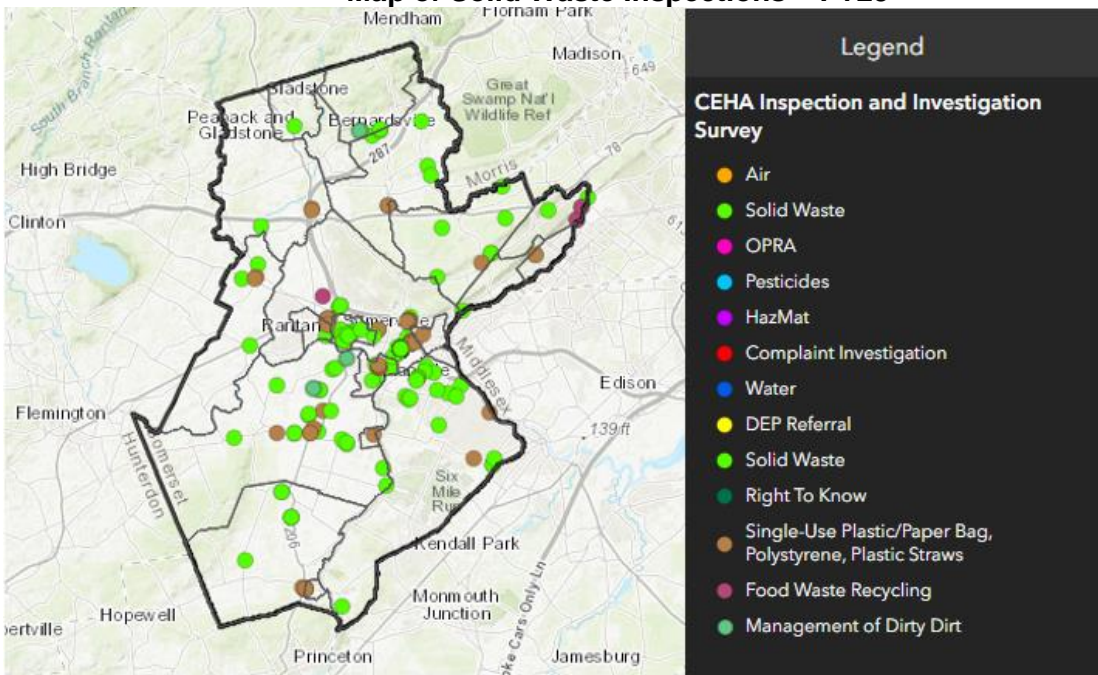
In fiscal year 2023, NJDEP also put into effect a new regulation requiring large food waste generators (over 52 tons of food waste per year) to source separate and recycle their



food waste. The new regulation currently only applies to generators located within 25 road miles of an authorized food waste recycling facility. SCDOH CEHA identified potential applicable generators and conducted 3 food waste recycling inspections. As these regulations develop, SCDOH will need to continue identifying potential establishments and provide education and outreach to maintain compliance throughout the county.



Map of Solid Waste Inspections – FY23



## **A Noise Free Environment**

Somerset County residents are concerned about excessive noise that degrades their quality of life. Accordingly, SCDOH is committed to respond to their concerns by appropriate investigation and enforcement of violations under the State Noise Code (N.J.A.C. 7:29). SCDOH employs several professionals certified in Community Noise Enforcement, and maintains regularly calibrated noise meters to properly investigate noise complaints. These complaints typically arise in areas where manufacturing and industrial facilities are in close proximity to residential zones. While the number of noise complaints remains low, each incident has significant impact upon the citizens subjected to it. Accordingly, SCDOH will react aggressively to ensure the elimination of unwanted and irritating noise, maintaining the quality of life that Somerset County residents deserve.

During FY2023, 6 noise complaints were received by the County. Investigations often occur during evening or early morning hours, when residents are most impacted by bothersome sound. Often a single complaint will result in multiple follow-up investigations in order to assure compliance. In fiscal year 2023, we assigned wind and noise meters to inspectors vehicles to reduce the response time and the investigate complaints in a more timely manner. We also purchased and utilized a noise meter that displays impulse and continuous noise readings simultaneously, as we saw increased noise complaints that were prospectively on the line between impulse and continuous sounds. This new meter allowed us to ensure we were getting the right readings at the right time, and erased the potential need to perform multiple investigations for the same source. Noise complaints are anticipated to increase as industrial and commercial developments increase in primarily residential areas.

It is important to note that many other instances of noise pollution are handled each year at the municipal level, as several townships have adopted the Model Noise Code and pursue enforcement with police officers or local health department personnel. As an agent of the NJDEP, CEHA staff members are certified only to enforce the State's Noise Code, and may not enforce municipal ordinances. Therefore SCDOH has been an active partner in ensuring that ongoing training and resources are available to local departments.



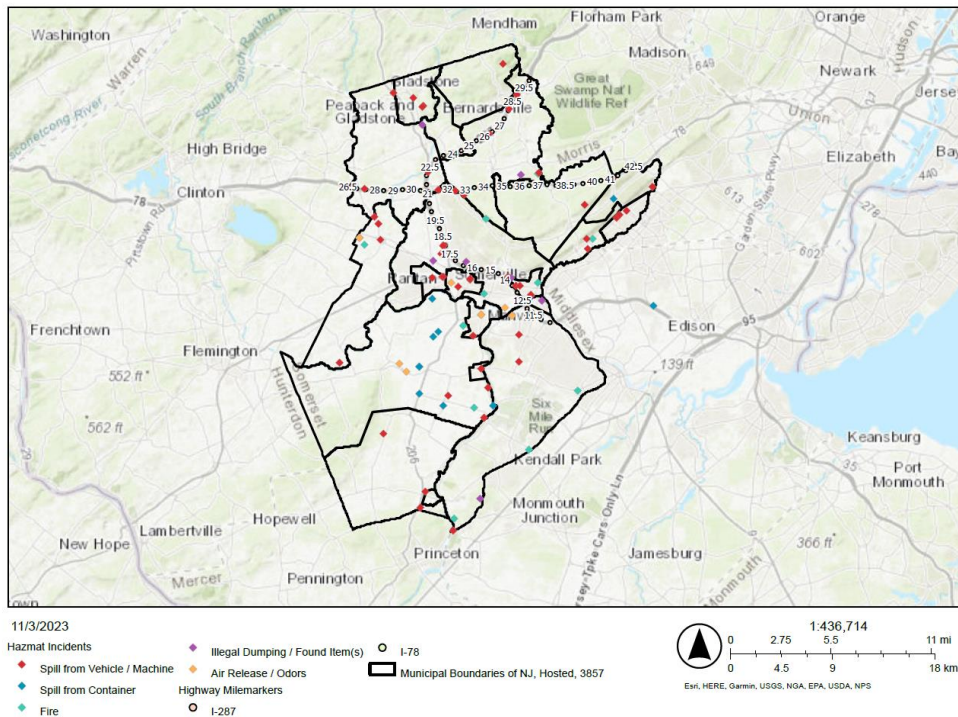
## Hazardous Materials Emergency Response

Somerset County residents must be protected from the health and ecological risks posed by hazardous substances. Emergency response to any discharge of potentially hazardous material is overseen by the Somerset County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), which coordinates the County's Hazmat team. A portion of CEHA grant funding is utilized each year for their equipment, medical surveillance, and training needs.

CEHA staff works in partnership with the Somerset County Office of Emergency Management to investigate environmental releases, mitigate potential threats to the environment, enforce applicable regulations, and ensure continued environmental and public health oversight when incident mitigation and remediation are ongoing. During fiscal year 2023, Hazmat responders, volunteers, and CEHA Inspectors responded to 104 incidents, increasing from 103 incidents during fiscal year 2022 and 85 incidents during fiscal year 2021. From 2005 through 2022, these dedicated individuals have responded to over 1000+ calls for service.



FY2023 Hazmat Incidents



## Environmental Health Education & Outreach

There are many vital issues affecting Somerset County residents not specifically outlined in this report, as the CEHA program is limited in scope. Local, County and State agencies work in partnership to address resident's concerns about indoor air quality, underground storage tanks, septic systems, lead poisoning, site remediation, occupational health and a multitude of other topics. Regulation and education in these areas are accomplished through the comprehensive efforts of public health officials, environmental commissions, planning boards, construction and fire code officials, and numerous other stakeholders.

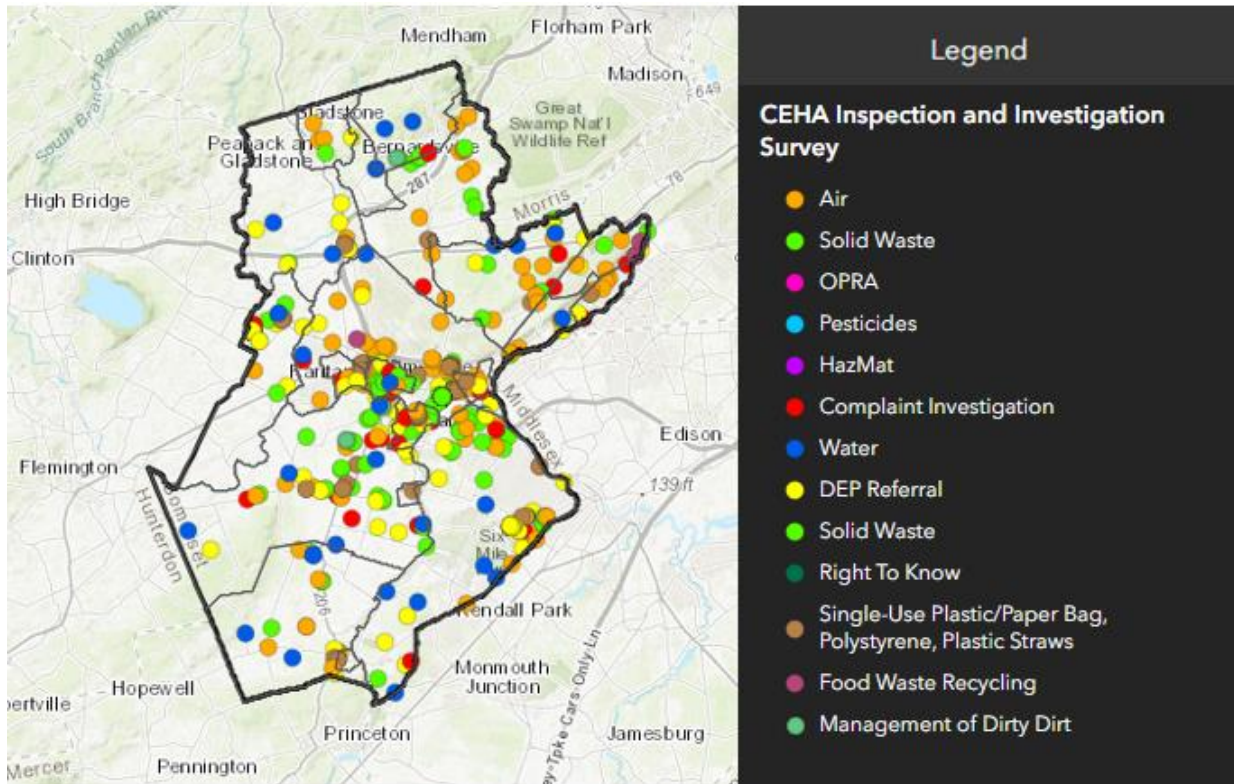
Maintaining dialogue between agencies about emerging issues of concern to Somerset County residents is necessary to foster excellence in our efforts to improve public health and environmental quality. The Somerset County Department of Health encourages the development of strategic partnerships with other governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, the general public and the business community to address environmental concerns. Providing timely outreach for both residents and members of the regulated community is a continued priority for Somerset County's CEHA program. Enforcement of the State's various regulations must occur hand-in-hand with outreach efforts and compliance assistance initiatives. The following highlights some of the activities and events developed over the years to enhance environmental health throughout the County:

- ❑ CEHA collected operational data by utilizing GPS equipment, cellular service enabled devices, and ESRI ArcGIS mapping software to assist NJDEP, CEHA internal report production, and program progress tracking. This system shows a more complete view of CEHA inspection types, locations, and outcomes and can be analyzed and easily understood.
- ❑ Developed an environmental health survey instrument to identify the major complaints encountered by our environmental and public health colleagues, and used the data to develop a comprehensive training and networking seminar, providing information on wildlife control, air pollution issues, water quality and the safe and legal disposal of syringes & household medications.
- ❑ As stated above under Solid Waste and Recycling, ongoing partnership with the Somerset County Division of Solid Waste Management to ensure successful Household Hazardous Waste collection events. As well as, outreach to the public to ensure the proper disposal of numerous materials and education.
- ❑ Investigate idling complaints and provide idling surveillance activity to reduce air and noise pollution as an overall benefit to better air quality.
- ❑ Somerset County Department of Health monitors and enforces the NJDEP Pesticide Control Regulations (N.J.A.C 7:30-1 et seq.) Routine inspections and complaint investigations are completed of commercial and private pesticide applicators and businesses. Pesticide inspections of New Jersey schools are also conducted along with each school's site-specific Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program and policy. In FY'2023, 15 Integrated Pest Management inspections and 10 landscaper inspections were completed.

- ❑ Process and review open public records act (OPRA) requests for CEHA related records related to the request as intended to expand the public's right of access to government records.
- ❑ Worked with the Somerset County Park Commission, among other agencies, to train staff in basic environmental emergency reporting, response and investigation.
- ❑ Hosted the NJ Division of Criminal Justice, Environmental Crimes Unit, to provide training for Somerset County law enforcement, health and emergency management officials with information on investigating environmental crimes.
- ❑ Presented information regarding solid waste transportation safety/regulatory issues & idling enforcement to the Somerset County Traffic Officers' Association.
- ❑ Provided a compliance seminar for County schools and municipalities focused on air pollution permitting requirements, recycling, lab management & pesticide control.
- ❑ Collaborated with the County Office of Emergency Management and drinking water utilities to update local emergency notification protocols within Somerset County.
- ❑ Presented information on CEHA air pollution inspections to Somerset County fire marshals, partnering to increase the identification of unregulated facilities.
- ❑ Partnered with the County Planning Department to deliver wastewater management information to local health officials.
- ❑ Collaborated with the Park Commission's Environmental Education Center during Earth Day outreach events.
- ❑ Developed a comprehensive compliance seminar for Somerset County dry cleaners.
- ❑ Obtained specialized EPA training in Shoreline Assessment & Clean-Up.
- ❑ Partnered with NJDEP in development of a new surface water quality database.
- ❑ Developed a low-cost radon testing program in collaboration with local health departments, the business community and the Somerset County Cancer Coalition.
- ❑ Partnered with the Rutgers Environmental Stewardship program to educate emerging environmental health professionals on the scope of environmental regulations and enforcement avenues in New Jersey.
- ❑ Ongoing collaboration with law enforcement during solid waste truck checks to ensure DMV requirements are met.
- ❑ Collaborating with local Environmental Commissions to determine targeting areas for motor vehicle idling enforcement and illegal dumping.



## CEHA GIS Operations Map View of FY'2023



For additional information regarding the CEHA program, please contact the Department at (908) 231-7155 or via e-mail at [ceha@co.somerset.nj.us](mailto:ceha@co.somerset.nj.us).

<https://www.co.somerset.nj.us/government/public-health-safety/health-department/services/environmental-health>