

12.19.2020 ENVIRONMENT

County test shows toxins in Manorville wells

By Tara Smith





New evidence of water contamination in Manorville wells is fueling a ramped-up effort to connect residents in the area to a public water supply.

Data released by the Suffolk County Health Department this week show that PFOS and PFOA — chemicals found in firefighting foams and nonstick materials — were detected in a survey conducted this fall of 95 residential wells located south of the former naval weapons reserve in Calverton.

According to the report, four wells sampled revealed higher-than-allowed levels of PFOS and PFOA, with results as high as 81.6 and 98.5 parts per trillion. The contaminants were detected in ten additional wells, though they were within the newly adopted state standard of 10 parts per trillion.

“Those numbers are excessively high and very alarming,” Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said in an interview Friday. Ms. Esposito noted that those readings are even higher than the previous standard of 70 ppt.

Of the wells tested, 13 showed high iron detections, two wells exceeded limits for manganese, and one well was shown to have an excessive amount of chlorine and toluene, a volatile organic compound that can have impacts on the nervous system, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

“It really just proves what we knew all along,” said Manorville resident Kelly McClinchy, who earlier this year collected a petition of over 60 residents asking that public water be extended to their homes. “We had a sense that something was wrong here.”

The tests were conducted at no charge to residents by the county health department as impacted homeowners work with environmental advocates and elected officials to secure funding for a public water connection.

“Clean water is a necessity, not a luxury item,” Ms. Esposito said Friday.

Both the Riverhead Water District and Suffolk County Water Authority have expressed interest in providing connections to the neighborhood.



In February, the Town Board authorized H2M consultants to provide a map and plan to consider the extension of the water district to include properties along River Road, Old River Road, Horton Court, Wading River Manor Road, Oakwood Drive, Line Road and Grumman Boulevard.

Their report, which determined that the district has enough capacity to bring water to the area, estimates the total project cost could be \$4.8 million, including construction, engineering, inspection, legal and other costs.

Residents impacted could also be subjected to annual taxes of over \$3,700 and subject to what's known as a "key money " fee of \$6,052 to cover the cost of increased capacity, according to the engineering report.

Officials for the Suffolk County Water Authority confirmed Friday that they'd be able to extend a main into the area, though no detailed plans or cost analysis were immediately available.

"The water authority is ready and willing to help if we're asked," Deputy CEO for Operations Joseph Pokorny said.

Claims that the water authority is trying to encroach on Riverhead's district lines "couldn't be further from the truth," Mr. Pokorny said.

He said the SCWA needs to gain a more precise understanding of which homes are impacted before presenting their proposal. "That whole area is underserved right now," he said.

Ms. Esposito said they are interested in pursuing federal and state grants to help people connect to the public water supply and said there has been a bipartisan effort by lawmakers to pressure the Navy to undertake the expenses.

"Everyone is on the same page," she said. "People need public water."

In a statement Friday, Congressman Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) called for the immediate testing and remediation of contaminated drinking supplies.



Industrial Reserve Plant in Calverton.

Mr. Zeldin has helped secure House bills geared towards drinking water remediation and has called on the EPA to set maximum contaminant levels and regulate PFAS in drinking water.

In October, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) sent a letter to urge Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite to develop a comprehensive plan to turn private wells public and to expand the scope of their investigation into contaminants.



“By installing a water main for residences in the impacted areas, the Navy would be fulfilling its duty to protect the public health of residents and acting in accordance with the health and safety standards set within the state,” Mr. Schumer wrote, noting that less than a mile of water main would be needed to provide access.

Ms. McClinchy said she remains hopeful that funding will be found, whether that be through grants or from the Navy. “It shouldn’t be the residents because we didn’t do this,” she said.

The majority of her neighbors avoid drinking their tap water, she said, but are still exposed when showering, doing laundry and washing their dishes. “I want my neighbors to have peace of mind every time they turn the water on,” Ms. McClinchy said. “We want the Navy to take responsibility.”

The Navy has thus far declined to clean up or test land that’s more than a mile outside the boundaries of the former Grumman site, saying it can only clean up or remediate land which was polluted by the Navy operations there.

Ms. Aguiar said the Navy must be held accountable. “We now have concrete evidence and leverage to move forward in unison,” she said Friday, suggesting the town may even pursue legal action to force the Navy to pay for the extension.

“We need to immediately work on mitigating this,” she said. “People deserve clean, healthy water.”

Tara Smith is a multimedia reporter who joined the Times Review Media Group in 2018, covering everything



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