

DEC orders action on Bethpage groundwater plume

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By Emily C. Dooley



A monitoring well in a municipal lot in Bethpage that tracks groundwater plumes flowing from a former Bethpage manufacturing site. The well is in a municipal lot located in the rear of St. Martin of Tours Church in Bethpage on March 17, 2016. Photo Credit: Howard Schnapp

The state Department of Environmental Conservation ordered Northrop Grumman late last week to speed up treatment of a contaminated groundwater plume in Bethpage or risk legal action.

In a letter to the defense contractor, DEC acting commissioner Basil Seggos said construction of a remediation well to treat a hot spot of contamination coming from the Superfund site had to begin within the end of the year.

“The contaminated groundwater plume could clearly impact many Long Islanders’ drinking water supply and, if not addressed immediately, has the potential to have far-reaching consequences to the residents of Bethpage,” Seggos wrote.

The state’s demand comes in the wake of Northrop Grumman’s submission of a design plan for a remediation well near Park Avenue and Emma Street to treat contamination; and the discovery late last

year that a nearby monitoring well had detected 14,700 parts per billion of a mixture of volatile organic chemicals.

Chief among the chemicals is a solvent called trichloroethylene, or TCE, which is classified as a likely carcinogen. The drinking water standard for TCE is 5 parts per billion.

[NassauLetter from the DEC](#)

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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Mr. Wesley G. Bush, President
Northrup Grumman Corporation
2980 Fairview Park Drive
Falls Church, VA 22042

Mr. Edward J. Hannon, Manager ESHM
Northrup Grumman Systems Corporation
925 South Oyster Bay Road
Bethpage, NY 11714

Dear Mr. Bush and Mr. Hannon:

The DEC letter said it accepted Northrup Grumman's design plan and required that a work plan with a schedule and remediation goals should include an expedited timeline.

"We received the letter and are reviewing the details," Northrup Grumman spokesman Vic Beck said in a statement. "We are appreciative that the state supports the plan we submitted . . . to continue to address groundwater issues in Bethpage."

In the letter, the DEC said if Northrup Grumman does not agree to speed up treatment "the state will perform the cleanup with Superfund moneys and take legal action against [Northrup Grumman] to recover all state costs."

Manhattan attorney Lawrence "Larry" Schnapf said the state has "authority to reject or request modifications to reports," but Northrup Grumman could seek dispute resolution.

For decades, the state, Northrup Grumman, the Navy and water districts have grappled with how to treat a complex series of contaminated plumes traced back to a more than 600-acre manufacturing site. It was once used by the Navy and what is now Northrup Grumman to manufacture and test airplane and space exploration vehicles, including the Apollo lunar module.

[WaterLook up contaminated sites](#)



The hot spot is associated with a plume coming from Bethpage Community Park, on land that was donated to Oyster Bay Town in 1962. Before that, Northrop Grumman used the area as a legal dumping spot for paint, oils, chromium-tainted sludge, arsenic and solvents. Jet and plane fuels also were set ablaze for fire training classes.

Contamination of drinking water was discovered in the late 1940s, with volatile organic chemicals documented in the mid-1970s. The sites are subject of several cleanup plans.

Local water districts and politicians say the state's handling of the cleanup has been delayed and has put the drinking water supplies of about 250,000 people at risk.

The hot spot of contamination was discovered at a well site off Seaman Avenue, which is more than a mile from Bethpage Community Park. It is the highest documented concentration of contamination to have migrated from the site so far, said Richard Humann, president and CEO of H2M architects + engineers, which represents the Bethpage Water District.

"It's a great development from the water district's point of view," Humann said about the call to fast track treatment. "There's enough information and mass there that you should be pumping and treating immediately."

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Other water districts have been watching the plume with a wary eye as it moves farther south, past Southern State Parkway. “The sense of urgency has not been present in the past and we certainly welcome it,” said Stan Carey, superintendent of the Massapequa Water District.

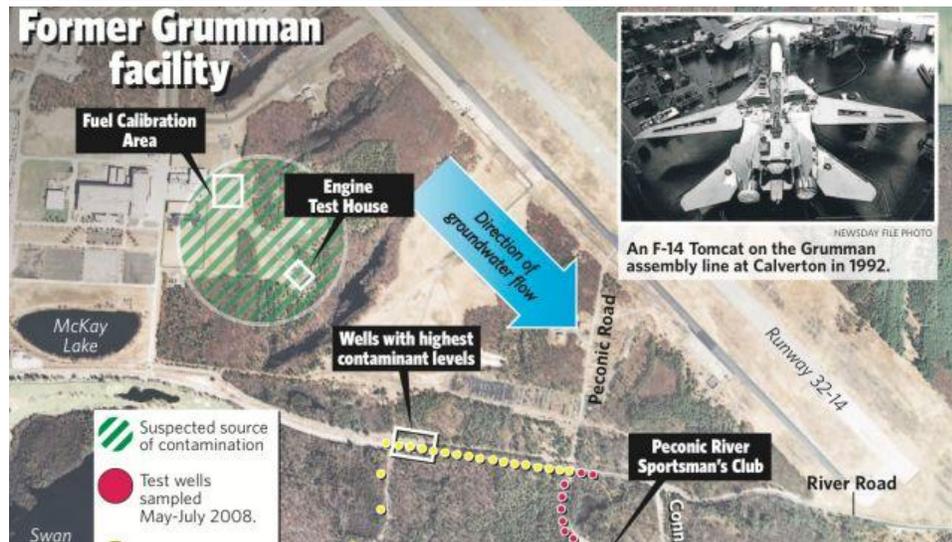
The state’s demand comes four days after Bethpage Water District notified the DEC that one of its wells had exceeded drinking water standards because of elevated levels of radium, a radioactive element that can cause cancer. The affected well, located off Sophia Street, had been offline since 2013 because of earlier radium detections but had continued to be tested.

In response, the DEC ordered Northrop Grumman to open up its wells for more testing and to do a comprehensive examination to see where radium may have been coming from. It also required the contractor to write a comprehensive report about any radioactive materials that might have been handled on site.

State Department of Health officials said last week that the Bethpage Water District well was the first on Long Island to be removed from service because of high radium levels.

Meanwhile, attorneys for Bethpage Water District filed objections last week to a U.S. magistrate judge ruling that tossed out a part of a lawsuit filed against Grumman over groundwater contamination. The magistrate judge said the claims were barred because they did not fall within a 3-year of statute of limitations. Bethpage disagrees on when the clock started ticking and has filed its objections, which will be ruled on by a district court judge.

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“We have objected to the report and recommendations and we believe our objection is strong,” attorney Robin Greenwald said.