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Peconic Green Growth, county launching pilot program for new septic systems

by [Chris Lisinski](#) |
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For homeowners interested in a more environmentally friendly septic system, Peconic Green Growth is offering to install eight alternative recharge dispersal fields as part of a pilot program with Suffolk County.

The new approach will replace leaching pits — which are currently used in most systems across Suffolk County — with a variety of setups that disperse wastewater higher up in the soil. That'll reduce nitrogen that leaks into the soil and water. Closer to the surface, microorganisms can process the element at a much higher rate.

Depending on which version homeowners choose, the amount of nitrogen “could be reduced anywhere from 30 percent to over 90 percent compared to current systems,” said Glynis Berry, executive director of PGG.

Thanks to a county grant, the new dispersal fields are available at a subsidized rate for those chosen from a field of applicants. The installation costs will be paid by PGG under the county's grant, and PGG will also pay the first year's worth of maintenance — likely between \$200 and \$400, Ms. Berry said. Residents must then pay for maintenance every year after that.

The new system requires a septic tank that is fairly up-to-date, Ms. Berry said. Those who have septic tanks that are too old will have to pay 50 percent of the cost of a new one, and those who have cesspools but need a new septic tank will have to pay 75 percent the cost of a new one. The pilot program will pay for the rest.

According to a representative at Danny's Cesspool Services in Riverhead, the average cost of a new septic tank is about \$2,000.

PGG will receive applications for the pilot program until Oct. 9 at 4:30 p.m., and the application notes "preference is given to properties in watersheds where excess nitrogen is a noted issue."

Participating in this program will allow residents to be "ahead of the curve," Ms. Berry said, as she expects cesspools to be forbidden under future regulation changes.

"The county is actively looking at what kind of programs they need for denitrification," she said. "When you're ahead of the curve, you get a little bit of subsidy."

Denitrification is a "critical" issue on the North Fork, Ms. Berry said. Excess nitrogen can reduce the quality of drinking water, and when it runs into larger bodies of water, it can cause algal blooms that lead to massive [fish die-offs](#), including the most recent instance in May.

"We know that the larger proportion of nitrogen loading to our surface waters is from on-site [septic] systems," Ms. Berry said. "We're basically killing our environment, so we have to do something."

Those interested in the pilot program can contact PGG at (631) 591-2402.