

LONG ISLAND

Environmentalists: State budget falls short

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Long Island saw several boosts to environmental programs in the newly passed state budget this week, but several environmentalists said the budget did not go far enough to protect the region's air and water.

The budget fell short in their view with the absence of more money for the state's Superfund program; less than what was requested for the state Environmental Protection Fund, and a delay instituting a program requiring diesel vehicles to meet modern emissions standards.

Peter Iwanowicz, executive director of Albany Environmental

Advocates of New York said "people spent more time swatting away their bad ideas than working constructively on environmental protection."

One such idea, Iwanowicz said, was in Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's budget, which would have changed state pesticide reporting regulations by dropping a requirement that commercial applicators report data on pesticide usage, and kept the state Department of Environmental Conservation from issuing an annual report on pesticide use.

The approved budget made no change in the 1996 law.

"It's a huge victory for Long Island," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the nonprofit Citizens Campaign for the Envi-

ronment. "The victory is keeping a good law intact."

Money was also allocated to the state DEC to begin twice-yearly pickups of unwanted pharmaceuticals from hospitals and other health care facilities on Long Island. The new collections, which will supplement the federal DEA's twice-yearly pickups, aims to keep pharmaceuticals out of the area's waterways by giving the facilities a way to dispose of the drugs other than by flushing them down toilets.

Esposito said trace amounts of pharmaceuticals already have been found in groundwater samples in Suffolk County.

But advocates said the budget fell short in other areas. Less money than hoped for was di-

rected to the state's Environmental Protection Fund. The fund is allocated toward land acquisition, wastewater treatment, and other environmental initiatives and increased by \$9 million to \$162 million — far short of the \$200 million requested by some environmental groups.

"It's not as much as we needed or wanted," said Laura Haight of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

One third of the increase went to Suffolk County, which received \$3 million for water quality protection to help the efforts to shore up wastewater treatment systems, said County Executive Steve Bellone yesterday.

The county will match the state money with \$3 million

from its wastewater infrastructure fund. The money will go toward pilot programs for on-site alternatives to cesspools and septic systems, which release harmful nitrogen into the ground and waterways, Bellone said.

Haight said the state also delayed implementing a requirement that state vehicles and those of contractors that do business with the state meet tougher diesel emissions standards.

And no additional money was budgeted for the state's Superfund program. Haight said lawmakers estimate the program has about two years of funding left.

"It's going to be a slowdown — that's our biggest concern," she said.