

LONG ISLAND

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State plan for water protection

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New York State's environmental agency yesterday released a blueprint for protecting Long Island's drinking water from pesticides even as a key state legislator said the plan wasn't stringent enough and lacked deadlines for action.

Joe Martens, commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation, said a committee of government officials and outside experts will conduct evaluations of water quality and specific chemicals and develop methods to protect drinking water from pesticides.

"Our goal is to better protect Long Island's critical water resources, while meeting the region's pest management needs," he said in a statement.

Assemb. Robert Sweeney (D-Lindenhurst), chairman of the Committee on Environmental Conservation, called the DEC's plan "vague" and said it lacked deadlines for taking action.

"From my point of view, it's a shift in philosophy" from an earlier draft plan, "which I thought was stronger and erred more on the side of caution," Sweeney said.

The Long Island Pesticide Pollution Strategy gives the DEC until December to launch a committee to study how pesticides are used and whether they endanger aquifers and public health.

Members of the Technical Review and Advisory Committee will include state and local officials and representatives from academia and local groups. The panel will recommend safeguards against pesticides and identify other ways to control everything from weeds that im-

peril crops to termites that attack boardwalks.

Long Island draws its drinking water from just one aquifer, located close to the surface.

These factors, which the DEC says are unique in the nation, make it easier for pesticides to pollute water supplies used by 3 million Nassau and Suffolk residents.

Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the environmental group Citizens Campaign for the Environment, called the plan a practical compromise between environmentalists and agriculture.

"This has been a 10-year battle," said Esposito, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for State Senate in the 3rd District. "They included a number of key points we fought for, and now we will continue to fight to protect the public."

DEC spokesman Peter Constantakes said the agen-

cy cut an initial proposal to cancel or suspend the registration of active pesticide ingredients, partly because it "didn't consider pesticide management needs for agriculture."

However, the new plan specifies how the DEC would go about assessing whether to ban pesticides, Constantakes said.

John Gaylaro, a certified landscaper with Atlantic Nurseries Inc., of Dix Hills, said his industry is not the culprit, as it already abides by strict rules.

In contrast, home gardeners "can go anywhere and pick up a chemical and apply it anytime and at any rate . . . that's where the initiative should be placed, not on the professionals trying to do the right thing."

The DEC's plan includes an emphasis on public education and organic approaches might be considered.