



# Suffolk County Undertakes Review of Sewage Treatment Regulatory Program

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**Suffolk County, NY - November 25, 2015** - As an outgrowth of County Executive Steve Bellone's Reclaim Our Waters Initiative, the Suffolk County Health Department has undertaken a review of existing sewage treatment plant (STP) siting and enforcement practices to identify opportunities to further strengthen its regulatory programs.

"As part of a comprehensive approach to improve water quality, it makes sense to review our existing regulatory programs in consultation with governmental agencies and other stakeholders to identify areas where those programs can be improved," said Suffolk County Health Commissioner Dr. James Tomarken. "While aggressive efforts by wastewater management staff over the past several years to increase compliance are showing significant progress, there may be additional steps that can be taken to make the programs even more effective."

The Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS) regulates private wastewater treatment plants pursuant to a delegation agreement with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and inspects and samples all STPs on DEC's behalf. SCDHS also works closely with the [Suffolk County Water Authority \(SCWA\)](#), which provided important support for the county's recently completed Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan ("Comp Plan," May 2015). Over the past several weeks, SCDHS staff met with both agencies as part of the program assessment. The process evaluation of reviewing existing sewage treatment plant siting and enforcement practices implements a recommendation contained in the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan.

On November 5, SCDHS staff met with DEC to review existing regulatory and enforcement practices and identified a series of actions which the agencies agreed to pursue to enhance ongoing compliance efforts. On November 16, staff met with SCWA to discuss the siting criteria for sewage treatment plants as the first step in a joint review to identify potential modifications. Meetings with other stakeholders will also be scheduled.

The county's existing guidance for siting new or expanded wastewater treatment plants recommends that new plants should not be located within the zero to two year contributing area for public water supply wells, in accordance with New York State Department of Health protocols to protect drinking water supplies from potential pathogen contamination. The guidance also advises that the siting of STP discharges within the two to 50 year groundwater travel times should be minimized and requires that an advanced treatment process be implemented.

Discussions with DEC staff regarding permitting and enforcement have resulted in agreement on a series of steps to enhance regulation of STPs, including strengthening of enforcement protocols and the establishment of interim discharge standards to minimize potential pollution impacts from facilities that are being required to upgrade and facilities in startup mode that have not reached normal operating parameters. SCDHS also plans to implement a program to monitor for impact from pharmaceuticals and personal care products located downgradient of STPs. Implementation of these measures will occur over the next several months.

Over the past 14 months, Suffolk County has embarked on an historic, multi-faceted program to address longstanding concerns regarding water quality and is committed to long-term efforts to address those concerns. "Undertaking an assessment of our siting and regulatory practices in collaboration with our agency partners is an important part of that process," Dr. Tomarken noted.

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