

LONG ISLAND

Renewed effort to fund study of algae blooms

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Health and planning officials are pressing Suffolk lawmakers for \$133,000 to combat a growing variety of harmful algae blooms that have damaged local bays, lakes and shellfisheries.

The push comes after county lawmakers last week tabled the funding resolution when Legis. Louis D'Amaro (D-North Babylon) expressed frustration that research of past blooms has not moved the county closer to a solution. The issue will face another legislative vote May 13.

Walter Dawydiak, the health department's director of environmental quality, said the problem, largely a result of too much nitrogen in bays and lakes, is complicated because more than a half-dozen harmful blooms have emerged in the past decade.

The blooms have damaged the hard clams in the Great South Bay and Peconic Bay's scallops, though the scallop population has made limited strides.

"We have to synthesize and galvanize our efforts and make sure we are looking in the right places," said Dawydiak. He said the harmful blooms have grown to such an extent "it's becoming an incubator situation."

Unlike past efforts, largely funded out of the capital budget to buy equipment to monitor the problems, the county wants a one-time infusion of about \$100,000 to develop new strategies, from the county's watershed protection program funded with a quarter-cent sales tax. Those county funds will be supplemented with \$32,000 from New York Sea Grant, also active in researching the problem of algae blooms. Officials expect to launch its latest initiative by September and hope to have an updated plan in a year.

As part of the initiative, the county would also spend \$28,000 to assess the impact of the 5-year-old aquaculture leasing program in Peconic Bay. Currently, the county has 41 leases totaling 635 underwater acres where oysters are being cultivated privately in a cultivation zone that totals 110,000 acres.

DeWitt Davis, a county planner, said the shellfish populations help filter water, reducing pollution, and currently generate about \$4 million in oysters annually, with a multiplier impact of \$18 million on the local economy. By the time the 10-year leases are up, officials expect to have 71 leases, oysters worth \$18 million, and an economic impact of \$32 million.