

New Wastewater Treatment System To Help 'Reclaim Our Water' On L.I.

By JESSICA OPATICH & JORDAN BOWMAN • JUN 1, 2016



Southampton Supervisor Jay Schneiderman (left) and Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone inspect the new wastewater treatment system in Hampton Bays, L.I.

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After decades of declining water quality and a septic system that almost overflowed into the Peconic Bay last year, Suffolk County has a new wastewater treatment system that will avoid contamination of bays, harbors and even drinking water.

The system in Hampton Bays works by removing nitrogen from wastewater. Too much nitrogen in water can lead to algal blooms, which reduce oxygen in water and kill large numbers of fish. It can even produce toxins and bacterial growth that can pollute drinking water. The new system more than doubles the amount of nitrogen filtered from the wastewater.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone said the nitrogen removal system is one step in the larger "[Reclaim our Water](#)" effort to combat decades of declining water quality.

“We have stacks and stacks and stacks of studies, meanwhile every water body in our region is listed as an impaired water body. It’s time for action.”

Suffolk County relies on septic systems, and county officials say that has led to an increase in nitrogen pollution in Long Island Sound and the Peconic Bay.

Justin Jobin, the environmental projects coordinator with the Suffolk County Health Department, said, “We have to change that mentality and make people aware that just because you flush the toilet and it goes away doesn’t mean that it’s not doing any harm.”

An estimated 360,000 single family homes in Suffolk County still use outdated septic systems. A pilot program has placed smaller versions of this new system in a handful of homes in the hope that it will lead to broader use.

Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman said the county's septic system in Hampton Bays overflowed last year and almost reached the Peconic Bay.

“This was a disaster waiting to happen. You had these cesspools so close to the Peconic Bay and you know it’s in areas of high velocity erosion, and one major hurricane and it could have washed away all the sand in front, taken those cesspools and just kind of washed them right out onto the bay. And that would have been a tremendous environmental disaster.”

The new water treatment system is the first of its kind in Suffolk County.