

WATER PRESSURE

■ **NY urges** feds to expand testing to protect health

■ **Detection** of unregulated contaminants the goal

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State health and environment officials pressed the federal government yesterday to expand a program to survey drinking water supplies for unregulated contaminants to better protect public health.

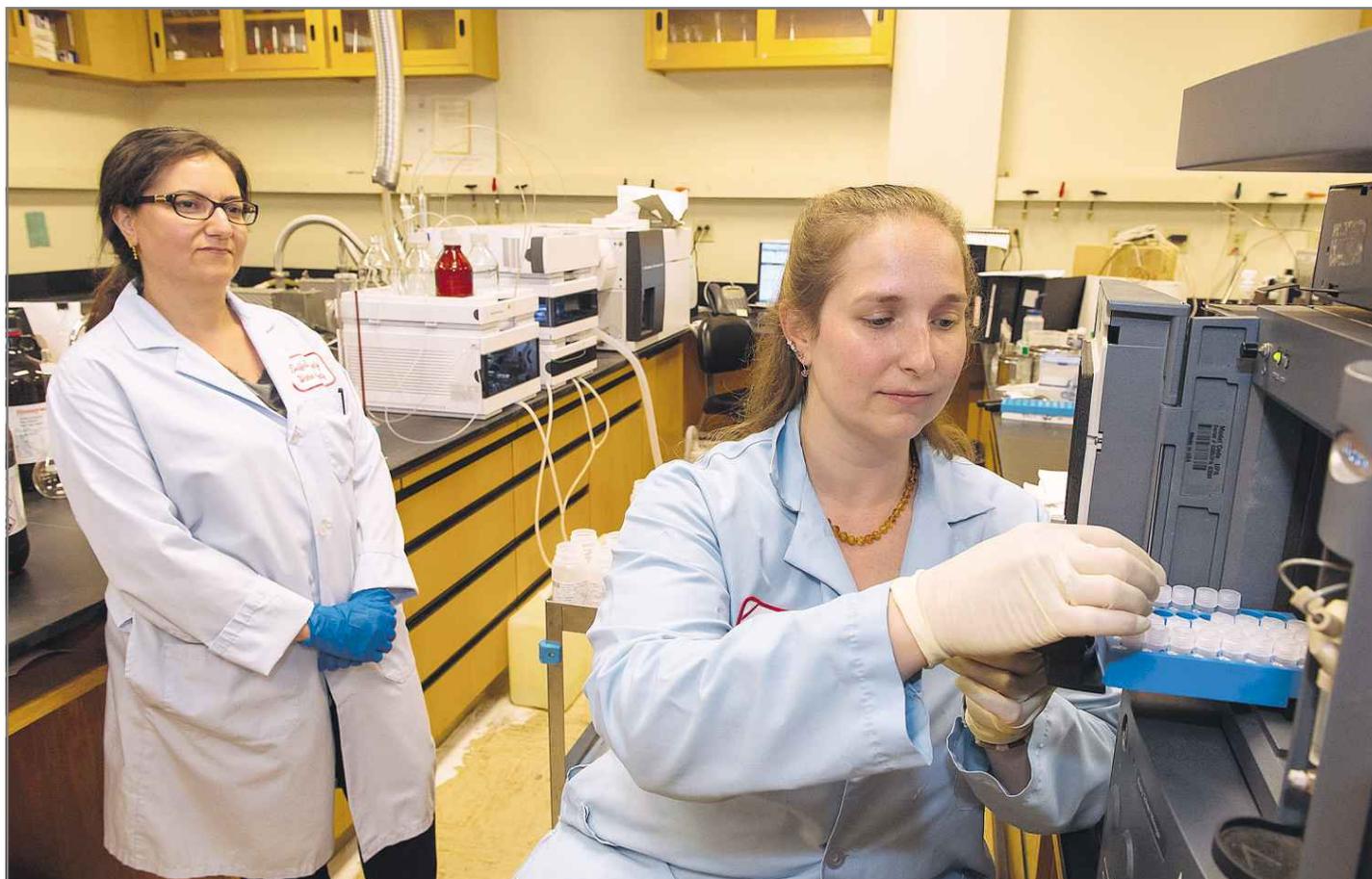
They said the current rule “leaves communities across the nation at risk” and pointed to the discovery of hazardous chemicals thought to potentially cause blood, immune system, thyroid and fetal growth issues that have been found in Suffolk County near Gabreski Airport, in Hoosick Falls and elsewhere.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s monitoring program helped detect the chemicals, known as perfluorinated compounds, in public water supply wells near Gabreski but no such sampling happened in the Village of Hoosick Falls because the water district was too small. Instead, a resident asked the village to test for the chemicals, which eventually led to people being barred from drinking the water or using it for cooking until treatment systems could be installed.

Drinking water contamination is a nationwide problem, but is particularly acute on Long Island, where the area’s nearly 3 million residents rely on underground aquifers to provide drinking water. The Island is also home to more than 250 state and federal superfund sites, nearly 90 percent of which have some sort of groundwater contamination leftover from a legacy of military, manufacturing, agricultural and other uses.

Every five years, EPA requires public water suppliers serving more than 10,000 customers to test for up to 30 chemicals that do not have drinking water standards and would not normally be looked for. Another 800 small water suppliers across the country also are chosen to survey.

But New York State said that means only a fraction of the



Workers test water samples from private wells near Gabreski Airport at the Suffolk County Water Authority in Hauppauge on July 28.

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state’s nearly 9,000 water suppliers take part in the EPA-mandated testing. In Hoosick Falls, where the district serves less than 5,000 people, the testing was not required.

“In New York State alone, this arbitrary threshold leaves 2.5 million people at risk,” state Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Basil Seggos testified at an Albany hearing yesterday. “We are therefore calling on the EPA to expand [its] program to require sampling of all public water systems regardless of size. If testing were required in all of these cases, PFOA [a chemical] in the Village of Hoosick Falls water

system could have been detected earlier.”

Health Commissioner Howard Zucker said, “If there is no response quickly, we will intervene,” saying New York would pursue state regulations to require smaller water suppliers do the same tests as those serving populations of 10,000 or more.

Zucker and Seggos sent a letter to the EPA yesterday, in addition to testifying in Albany about water-quality issues statewide. Another hearing will be held Monday in Suffolk.

State Department of Health records show there are 36 small community water suppliers on Long Island, and while none have more than 10,000 customers, they represent a population of more than 105,000 people, including mobile home parks, barrier island communities and villages.

EPA’s public affairs office in Washington said the most recent round of unregulated contaminant testing covered 80 percent

of residents in the nation and that the number of large and small suppliers surveyed was adequate. In New York State, 57 small water districts were sampled, according to EPA data.

“This data provides a nationally representative assessment of the occurrence of unregulated contaminants in the nation’s public water systems,” the agency said in an email. “EPA is confident that the . . . process provides information on the levels at which the contaminants are found and the population potentially exposed to those contaminants to support agency decision making about whether to regulate particular contaminants.”

In its letter to EPA, the state asked for the agency to provide funding for the additional public-water supply districts. Large water suppliers foot the sampling bill but EPA helps with the costs of testing for the smaller districts. In the latest round, EPA spent about \$4.14 million, the bulk of

which funded the tests in the smaller districts, the agency said.

The state also said it would push legislation requiring the testing of private wells upon the sale of a property or construction of a new well, and that landlords also must sample their wells and notify tenants of the results. Testing would be required in areas where contamination is suspected or known near Superfund sites.

Suffolk County has about 40,000 to 45,000 private wells serving about 200,000 people. Earlier this year, the county urged residents with private wells near Gabreski to use bottled water. Suffolk County did not respond to requests for comment, but Newsday previously reported the county and state are working to hook up those affected to public water supply wells. About 500 private wells are in Nassau County, said Mary Ellen Laurain, director of the health department’s division of communications and health education.