



Legis. Bill Lindsay and Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone meet at Roman Stone Construction in Bay Shore to announce the provisional approval of the second advanced alternative wastewater system in Suffolk County.

Courtesy photo

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Where are we in terms of alternative systems?

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Last month, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone announced the approval of the second alternative wastewater treatment system since adopting Article 19 of the sanitation code.

The Norweco Singulair TNT advanced wastewater treatment system has been provisionally approved for residential use in Suffolk County, marking another significant moment in the Suffolk County Septic Demonstration Pilot Program. This is the second technology provisionally approved by the Suffolk County Department of Health for residential use since Article 19 of the county's sanitation code was adopted in July 2016, which granted them the authority to formulate procedures and protocols in order to approve the use of wastewater treatment systems throughout the county.

The first approval was announced back in September 2016.

“Approving yet another technology to reduce nitrogen levels in Suffolk County is a true indication that we all recognize the importance of our water quality,” said Bellone during a press conference. “We are committed to eliminating the harmful effects of nitrogen pollution in our ground and surface waters, and we will continue to work with our partners in the private and public sectors in order to do so.”

According to the county, both systems were the initial technologies used when the demonstration pilot program launched in December 2014 and have effectively reduced nitrogen levels to an Environmental Protection Agency standard of 19 mg/l — totaling about a 50 percent reduction. However, the county has seen numbers exceeding those requirements. They claim the second system approved has shown an 11 mg/l denitrification and an 18-19 mg/l denitrification with the first approved system.

Provisional approval has been granted for both systems for residential use, allowing single-family homeowners to voluntarily install the specific system without having to apply for a variance from the Suffolk County Department of Health Services. Monitoring of the systems will continue for two years with bimonthly samples before general approval is issued.

The program is part of the county's Reclaim Our Water initiative, which was designed to eliminate the region's nitrogen pollution crisis by installing advance on-site systems and sewerage in place of old cesspools.

Out of the 19 demonstration systems installed during the first phase of the demonstration pilot program, 10 of the systems were donated by Norweco and the Roman Stone Construction Company, a local company based in Bay Shore, representing over a \$100,000 investment. The press conference to announce the second approval was held at their facility.

"Roman Stone is pleased to share this important step forward with Suffolk County and proud to be manufacturing the Norweco Singulair wastewater treatment system because it is the right thing for the environment," said Thomas Montalbino, president of Roman Stone Construction Company, during a press conference last month.

Prior to the second approval, Town of Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine felt systems were available with lower denitrification levels. Letters were written expressing so.

Back in June 2016, the town unanimously passed a new chapter within the town code for the Nitrogen Protection Zone, which means any new construction, residential, commercial or industrial within 500 feet of any local waterways such as the Great South Bay, Carmans and Forge rivers, will require stricter nitrogen removal standards of either sewers or alternative systems with an 8 mg/l denitrification. The hope was to have a system approved by Jan. 1, 2017 to implement the zone. This didn't happen.

"At this point and time, the county has the pilot program underway in reference to advanced wastewater treatment systems. Thus far, we have provisionally approved two systems that homeowners can voluntarily implement on their property," said county spokesperson Vanessa Baird-Streeter. "We will continue with the pilot program to continue to review additional systems that will be beneficial in continuing to reduce nitrogen pollution in our waterways."

After hearing word of the second approved system reaching 11 mg/l denitrification, Romaine said he hopes to hear a response from the county in order to change his legislation to 11 mg/l so that it can be implemented as soon as possible.

"Our goal is nitrogen reduction," he said, stating that he is not going to fuss over a 3 mg difference. "We just need an official response from them so that we can redraft the

legislation and mandate whatever system the county has adopted. We shouldn't wait a moment longer."

Since the county's announcement, Romaine also wrote a letter to the Suffolk County Department of Health Services voicing frustration with the county's practice of grandfathering existing sanitary systems.

He wrote, "The practice of grandfathering existing sanitary systems should be ended. The only exception would be if an owner/applicant were able to meet certain nitrogen loading criteria." He said he believes the practice is wrong and should only be possible when someone can prove little or no nitrogen loading would take place.

Kevin McAllister of Defend H2O said he believes the process is illegal and intended to encourage business. He said the practice skirts around the state's standards for commercial discharges, thus making it illegal.

"I am convinced it's an illegal loophole," he said. "It's basically just for developers to avoid costs."

According to the county, they are taking a look at that process and plan to address it in an appropriate manner.

Dick Amper of the Long Island Pine Barrens said he believes progress is being made on all fronts. "Water quality is finally being addressed on a federal, state, county and town level," he said. He hopes to see a plan to subsidize homeowners who upgrade their systems voluntarily — at first. He said he believes over the course of the next 20 years, nitrogen removal will progressively get better and better.

Since the launch of the Suffolk County Septic Demonstration Pilot Program, more than 330 Suffolk County homeowners have entered two lotteries and 39 homeowners have been selected to receive a free system, which includes free installation, monitoring and maintenance for five years.

Suffolk County has more than 360,000 individual cesspools and septic systems — more than the entire state of New Jersey. According to the county, as part of the solution, clean water experts project that tens of thousands of on-site wastewater treatment systems will need to be installed throughout the county to effectively treat the region's declining water supply.

For more information on the Septic Demonstration Pilot Program and the county's Reclaim Our Water initiative, log on to www.facebook.com/stevebellone or www.suffolkcountyny.gov.