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Schumer expected to push for Navy's Calverton cleanup

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Worried that a plume of chemical-laden groundwater from the former Navy-owned Grumman property in Calverton will damage the Peconic River, residents and local officials are pressing the Navy to move more quickly to clean up the contamination.

Today, Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) is expected to join the chorus, with a letter urging the Navy to "immediately" develop a remediation plan for what he called "a very significant potential threat to the natural and drinking water resources in the area."

While contaminants have been detected at one drinking water well at a sportsman's club, the pollution does not appear to threaten public drinking-water wells in the area.

The Navy had been aware of some existing groundwater pollution stemming from fuel and industrial solvents spilled during the Grumman property's use as a jet-fighter plant decades earlier.

But the scope of the contamination became clear only after the Suffolk Health Department began its own investigation last summer along River Road, at the southern border of the property. Results from two dozen test wells indicate that a plume at least a third of a mile wide has moved southeast from the site and is probably discharging into the Peconic. Groundwater samples from those wells revealed far higher concentrations of chemicals such as dichloroethane than had been thought, with a few testing 130 to 200 times higher than state drinking water standards permit.

"The results surprised us," said Andrew Rapiejko, an associate hydrogeologist with the county. "It's about 1,600 to 1,700 feet wide, and we still didn't catch the end of it."

A Navy spokeswoman said she could not comment yesterday because she did not have information on the site.

Last week, Navy spokesman James Brantley told the Riverhead News-Review that the Navy would put more effort into locating contamination sources and weigh options for "more aggressively dealing" with it.



The pollution is thought to have come from an area where aircraft engine and fuel systems were tested. Chlorinated solvents like those spilled there turned up in a drinking water well at the Peconic River Sportsman's Club in 2007. The well has been fitted with a filter; it and others on the property are regularly tested for contaminants, Rapijko said.

Suffolk's investigation arose from concerns that the Navy, which had been monitoring the contamination since the 1990s, had not done enough to define the extent of the problem. "The U.S. Navy has indicated that the plume does not appear to be causing any significant impacts, and therefore may not need to be cleaned up," said a March 20 summary of the county's investigation.

Schumer plans to ask the Navy to reimburse the county for the \$150,000 it has spent to investigate the problem.

"We need to figure out very quickly whether remedial action is warranted, and if so, how quickly it can take place," said Peter Scully, regional director for the state Department of Environmental Conservation. Suffolk is conducting another round of sampling at the sportsman's club to better delineate the size of the plume.

The results, expected next month, should help officials decide what treatment would best clean up the pollution. "To design the options, you need more information," Rapijko said. "We are at the point where the county health department feels there needs to be some kind of remediation done on this plume. I don't believe the Navy is there yet."

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