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Navy Details Further Steps In Grumman Clean-Up

by Joe Pinciario

Calverton - The Navy presented progress on its testing and removal of contaminated material at Grumman Plant in Calverton last week, detailing clean-up of three polluted sites and steps being taken as part of an ongoing investigation south of Grumman.

At Thursday's Calverton Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) meeting, representatives from the environmental engineering firm Tetra Tech, on behalf of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC), outlined plans to determine exactly where groundwater is flowing at different depths in the area. The goal is to find the source of an underground plume suspected to be spreading in the direction of the Peconic River.



The goal is to find the source of an underground plume suspected to be spreading in the direction of the Peconic River. *Image courtesy of Google Earth*

Traces of several volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, have been found at Grumman, a former naval weapons plant. Testing by the Suffolk County Health Department earlier this summer reported VOCs as deep as it could drill - 115 feet - prompting Sens. Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), as well as Rep. Tim Bishop (D-1st), to call for the Navy to take action on the contamination.

In a letter outlining the officials' demands, Sen. Schumer, Sen. Gillibrand and Rep. Bishop asked that "the Navy immediately

discontinues applying the 'natural attenuation' policy to the Calverton case. It has become very clear that an advanced remediation action plan to clean up this site is needed, and it's time for the Navy to draft such a plan with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Suffolk County Department of Health and implement it without inundating local taxpayers with the cost."

At Thursday's meeting, a timeline was laid out for the Navy to meet in the near future to discuss a plan. In addition to the next RAB meeting on Thursday, Nov. 5, the first ever "technical meeting" will take place on Tuesday, Sept. 15 behind closed doors between "the Navy, DEC, and Suffolk County, and any technical experts they feel need to attend," according to NAVFAC Director of Public Affairs, Jim Brenton. While the results of the meeting will be made available to the public, RAB Co-Chair Bill Gunther wasn't pleased to hear the private nature of the meeting.

"Hopefully it's not a delaying tactic," he said.

So far, one public drinking well - on the site of the Peconic River Sportsman's Club, located southeast of Grumman - has been shut down due to contamination from the plume, which, due to the easterly direction of the area's groundwater, seems to have expanded east over time. Lora Fly, remedial project manager for NAVFAC, said the plume could potentially be up to 50-years old. The contamination was caused from a range of activities on the site - which was in use for over 40 years before closing in 1996 - from fire-training activities performed by lighting petroleum on fire to cleaning jet engines with strong chemical solvents.

To calculate the nature of the groundwater flow so a potential source point to the plume can be determined, 10 permanent monitoring wells will be installed in between the railroad tracks along River Road. "Once we know where the groundwater flows," said Tetra Tech's Rob Sok, "we will be able to pinpoint where we need any more monitoring wells if we're missing one." Groundwater sampling will continue through August and September, and slug testing will determine the water's flows at different depths.

PowerPoint presentations regarding four different sites outlined the extent of action already taken to remove contaminated material. Over 12,000 cubic yards of soil has been extracted so far, with another 8,000 cubic yards expected to be removed before December.

"The positive news is that there has been some good progress about cleaning up sources of contamination on the site to prevent future contamination in groundwater," Gunther said. "But I'm still concerned about the groundwater, and we'll continue to follow it."



A look at the south side of the Calverton Enterprise Park, where an underground plume has contaminated the area's drinking water. So far, the Peconic River Sportsman's Club has been the only public well shut off.