

EDITORIAL: Neglect won't clean up the Grumman site and beyond

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The U.S. Navy's way of dealing with the toxic plume in the soil at [Calverton](#), caused by production of Navy F-14s, has been to let nature take care of it. Its term for it is "natural attenuation." We call it neglect. Now the Navy may be changing course. But there's still room for skepticism.

Community activists believe the Navy has done a fairly good job of cleaning up the mess left behind on the site of the former Grumman plant. But its approach to a plume spreading southward outside the site falls well short of "all ahead flank" speed. It's been more like dead in the water.

This doesn't mean the Navy has approached it with bad will, but its narrow focus on human health, which the Navy believes is not yet endangered, is shortsighted. The toxic brew of volatile organic compounds also poses a threat to the environment, including the [Peconic River](#), a major tributary of the Peconic Estuary, an estuary of national significance.

Tests by [Suffolk's Department of Health Services](#) have found more toxicity in the groundwater and the river than had previously been known. So Sen. [Charles Schumer](#) wrote a bracing letter to the Navy and followed up with another letter with Sen. [Kirsten Gillibrand](#) and Rep. [Tim Bishop \(D-Southampton\)](#).

In November, the Navy will outline its evolving plan. It should abandon "natural attenuation," do more testing and active cleanup, and pay Suffolk back for its testing. The polluter should pay, even when it rules the high seas. hN

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