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RADIUM UNDER SCHOOL

Officials stress no danger after elevated levels found in Bethpage

A2-3

EXCESS-RADIUM FIND

Bethpage discovery follows similar test at high school; officials say no health risk

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY
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Elevated levels of radium have been detected in groundwater at three monitoring wells drilled at Central Boulevard Elementary School in Bethpage, but state officials said the water is not used for drinking and does not pose a health risk to students, staff or faculty.

The wells were drilled earlier this year after samples from monitoring sites at Bethpage High School also detected radium levels above drinking-water standards.

"We don't see any immediate health risks from the detection of radium in the water," said Martin Brand, deputy commissioner for remediation and materials management for the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

The samples were collected on Aug. 18.

Levels of total radium at the elementary school were between 9.68 and 32.15 picocuries per liter.

At the high school, which is less than two miles north, concentrations in the new samples were between 6.48 and 277 picocuries per liter, according to DEC, roughly the same as had been detected in the earlier tests.

The state drinking-water standard for total radium is 5 picocuries per liter. (The term is a measure not of mass but of radioactive decay; pico denotes a trillionth.)

Source is unclear

Radium is a naturally occurring radioactive element that in the past was used in some industrial processes. The source of the elevated readings is not yet clear.

Both schools are within the boundaries of plumes of groundwater polluted with volatile organic compounds that have been traced back to when the Navy and what is

What is radium?

- **Radium is a** radioactive metal that exists as one of several isotopes, with half-lives ranging from days to more than a thousand years.
- **Unstable,** it is formed when uranium and thorium decay, and itself breaks down into other elements, including radon.
- **It occurs naturally** in the environment and is found at low levels in soil, water, rocks, coal, plants and food.
- **Radium was once** used to make luminous paints for watch dials, clocks and military instruments, a practice stopped because of health concerns.
- **Exposure over long** periods can elevate the risk of developing cancer.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

now Northrop Grumman operated on a 600-acre parcel in Bethpage from the 1930s to 1990s to support war and space-exploration efforts.

"Even though this does not pose a risk to the public, they need to study this," said Bethpage Water District Superintendent Mike Boufis. "I would think seeing numbers like that — that's not naturally occurring."

The groundwater sampled was between 43 and 57 feet beneath the surface. The samples were split and sent to two laboratories for independent verification.

"Out of abundance of caution, DEC will continue to work with the school district to routinely monitor and inform the public on environmental conditions in the area," Brand said.

"Nothing is more important than the safety of our students and staff and the results to date have demonstrated we have no immediate health concerns in any of our schools," Bethpage school officials said in a statement released Friday.

Schools Superintendent Terrence Clark told Newsday the district has spent \$200,000 on the test wells and this summer installed a vapor barrier at the elementary school to block contaminants from escaping into the air. Sampling for radon — a byproduct of the decay of radium — was also done and the results should be released in about two weeks.

"This is something the school district really should not have had to take on," said Jeanne O'Connor, who lives in Bethpage and co-founded Bethpage Cancer Project to document cancer and autoimmune diseases of residents. "The DEC failed us. They should have been doing this from the start."

O'Connor said a source needs to be found so it can be cleaned up. "If it is coming from Grumman, how much is there?" she said. "We need to know how big this is going to be. Are we going to be having radon in our homes?"

A call to Northrop Grumman on Friday was not returned.

An ongoing saga

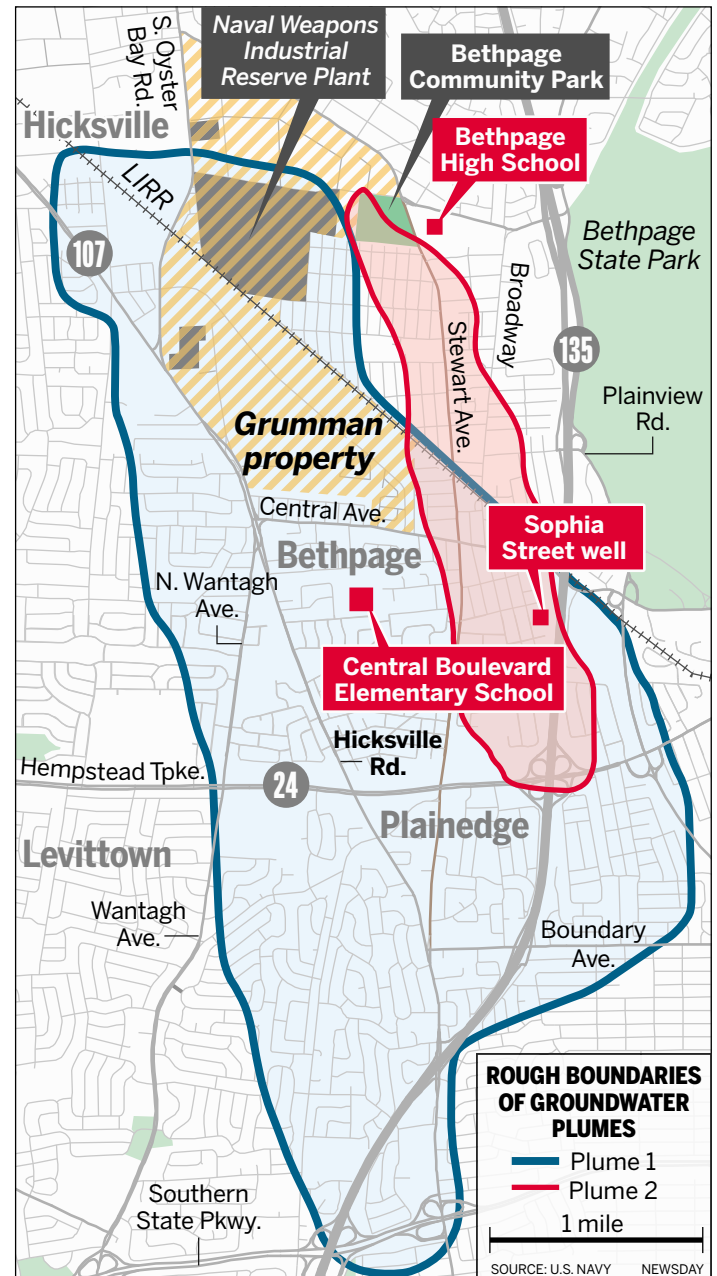
This is the latest development in the ongoing saga of groundwater and soil contamination in the area.

Groundwater contamination was first documented at the Navy/Grumman site in the 1940s and it was added to the state Superfund list in 1983.

It is subject to several state cleanup plans to remove contaminated soil and groundwater. Much of the focus has been on volatile organic chemicals but the detection of radium in groundwater has sparked additional concerns.

In 2013, the Bethpage Water District took a well at its Sophia Street location offline because of elevated radium levels.

In 2015, the school district installed three monitoring wells at the high school, which is across the street from Bethpage



Community Park, the site of one of the DEC's cleanup plans.

After the high school detections were announced in June, the DEC said it would work with the district to sample again. The agency also screened fields and grassy areas at the school campus and the community park for radioactive materials at ground level. None were detected.

Brand said the new information about the Central Boule-

vard school, nearly two miles from the high school, was another piece of data to include in their ongoing probe.

"We still think there's a strong chance that most of this radium we are seeing in the area is naturally occurring but we are doing a deeper dive with Grumman," Brand said. "We're not ready to make a firm conclusion on the source of the radium. Our investigation will continue."

AT 2ND SCHOOL

EPA REVEALS MORE WORK AT HEWLETT

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY
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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Friday announced the final stages of a \$24.7 million plan to clean up groundwater contamination at the Peninsula Boulevard Groundwater Plume Superfund site in Hewlett.

The federal plan's first phase began in 2011 and included pumping polluted groundwater to the surface for treatment. The EPA also will inject additives to break down contaminants in highly contaminated areas. The second phase will now target the sources of contamination at and around former dry cleaning operations. Additives will also be injected here (info is at epa.gov/superfund/peninsula-groundwater).

Water will be regularly tested during and after the work is complete.

Local residents and Woodmere Middle School get clean drinking water from several wells about 1,000 feet north of the Superfund site and it's monitored regularly, the EPA stated. "EPA is using the best available technology at the Peninsula Boulevard site to protect residents of Hewlett," said Acting Regional Administrator Catherine McCabe.

The site is the former home of Grove Cleaners, which operated at 1274 Peninsula Blvd. from 1987 to 1992. The site, next to Woodmere Middle School, was added in 2004 to the Superfund list of the most contaminated waste sites.

A tetrachloroethylene groundwater plume flows northwest from the site to the Long Island American Water Plant 5 Well Field, a source of drinking water. Water extracted there is treated to remove contaminants before distribution and is sometimes mixed with water from other sources, officials said.



Bethpage Water District Superintendent Mike Boufis, left, gives a tour to Sen. Chuck Schumer, center, and Navy Secretary Richard Spencer.

Navy head at site, vows 'right thing'

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY
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Navy Secretary Richard Spencer and Sen. Chuck Schumer met Friday with representatives of local water districts to discuss toxic plumes emanating from a Bethpage site where the Navy and the company that is now Northrop Grumman operated for decades.

Spencer, Schumer (D-N.Y.) and members of the Bethpage, Massapequa and South Farmingdale water districts discussed the plumes, speeding up the cleanup and addressing possible radioactive contamination. A Bethpage school district representative was also in attendance.

"The Navy knows its responsibilities," Spencer said after the gathering. "The Navy is not going anywhere. The Navy is part of this community . . . and we will do what is the right thing to do."

Schumer and Spencer also toured a well site owned by the Bethpage Water District, which has two forms of treatment in place to remove contaminants from the plumes. The district has spent millions on treatment to meet safe drinking water standards.

"We're building facilities like this and it's getting very expensive," Water District Superintendent Mike Boufis told the Navy secretary during a tour at the well site on Park Lane.

Spencer is the highest-level government official to visit the region concerning this topic. Schumer met with Defense Secretary James Mattis in July to discuss the plumes.

Schumer, the Senate minority leader, had pressed Spencer about the contamination during his confirmation hearing earlier this year.

"As everyone knows, there are 250,000 people who depend on the drinking water here and unfortunately it has been con-

taminated by the old plant, which the Navy worked with Grumman on," Schumer said.

A phone call to Northrop Grumman was not returned Friday.

The National Defense Authorization Act, which is in conference to iron out differences between passed Senate and House versions of the bill, includes \$323 million for the Navy's environmental restoration fund.

Spencer said that money could be used for remediation and Schumer said he would press to make sure cleanup of the plumes is a top priority.

"We have to stop it and stop it now," Schumer said.

Water district officials said they were encouraged that Spencer, who has been on the job six weeks, took the time to visit and listen to their concerns.

"He made a commitment to make this a priority," said Stan Carey of Massapequa.

"We welcome this like a breath of fresh air. Hopefully, going forward we can all work together."

From the 1930s to the mid-1990s, the Navy and Northrop Grumman researched, tested and manufactured airplanes and space-exploration equipment on a more than 600-acre parcel in Bethpage.

Groundwater contamination was first documented in the 1940s and the site was added to the state Superfund list in 1983. It is subject to several state cleanup plans to remove contaminated soil and groundwater, some of which has moved more than four miles from Bethpage, reaching into Levittown and past the Southern State Parkway.

Chief among the concerns have been volatile organic chemicals, such as the carcinogen trichloroethylene, but elevated radium levels have also sparked renewed attention.