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MAY 2020 Report

Litter From Discarded PPE Endangers Beaches & The Environment

Mother Nature may need some protection from personal protective equipment. Filthier beaches, clogged roadways and a dirtier environment could be the consequence of litter from used surgical gloves, face masks, sanitizing wipes and other PPE donned and doffed by everyday people to minimize coronavirus transmission. It's not just the litter that is causing the problems. Some well-intentioned wearers and janitors are improperly discarding PPE into the recycling stream, instead of in the ordinary trash where it belongs, forcing workers at processing plants to hand-sort the potentially contaminated waste on conveyor belts, the industry says. Gloves, wipes and other items are being flushed down the toilet, instead of disposed of in the trash, clogging sewage treatment plants.

Health commissioner, Dr. Oxiris Barbot, was asked about PPE's environmental impact. She said, "I'm aware of people littering with discarded PPE, and we would ask them not to do that." There is concern beyond the metropolitan area. For example, in Hong Kong, discarded face masks are accumulating on beaches and nature trails, leading to fears that marine life and wildlife habitats are endangered, according to a March report by Reuters. Improperly discarded PPE also poses a hazard to ocean wildlife such as turtles that might mistake the items for food. Marine organisms may also get tangled in it.

Ted Timbers, a spokesman for the city's Department of Environmental Protection, said in an email that 97% of street litter is now prevented from reaching the waterways, with a combination of screens, catch basins, brooms and other

means. Timbers wrote that, “the design of the City’s drainage system — which collects stormwater — has been upgraded/added to in order to capture any litter or debris that may wash into the system.” On the Island, unlike in New York City, nearly all rainwater collects in pits around Nassau and Suffolk counties to recharge groundwater, so discarded PPE on the streets and in parking lots can clog the drains and flood nearby roads.

Steve Changaris, New York State chapter director for the National Waste & Recycling Association, said that his member plants on Long Island and beyond have seen an increase in the amount of PPE “wish-cycling,” an industry term for putting an item that is non-recyclable in the recycling bin in the hope it will be recycled. He says that it’s not just individual wearers but janitorial staff that might dump an entire container of PPE into the recycling bin incorrectly. While sorting is automated at some plants, at others, he said, human workers must pick through the items moving along on a conveyor belt. Depending on the material, the virus can remain on an item for hours or days, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Shellfish Sanctuary to Help Clean Huntington Waters

A state-funded shellfish sanctuary will be established in Huntington Harbor to help clean the water. The Huntington Town Board voted to enter into an agreement with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to establish a sanctuary for adult and juvenile clams. “This is a brand-new program that establishes shellfish sanctuary areas to act as a filtration system to ensure our waterways are safe, clean and provide for a healthy environment. Harvesting of these clams is prohibited by law,” town Supervisor Chad Lupinacci said.

The town will be paid \$30,000 to cover the cost of dispersing the shellfish under the state's Long Island Shellfish Restoration Project. A maritime services vessel and associated staff will be used to disperse the shellfish in areas designated by the DEC. The restoration project has established other shellfish sanctuary sites in Bellport Bay, Huntington Harbor, Shinnecock Bay, South Oyster Bay and Hempstead Bay, according to the DEC website. In addition to working with municipalities, the DEC is collaborating with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Stony Brook University, local businesses, and volunteer organizations to produce, plant, and monitor shellfish and water quality enhancement throughout the project.

According to the state DEC website, the restoration project aims to provide biological and environmental information on shellfish growth, survival and spawning success, and to monitor the effect on water quality, phytoplankton uptake and filtration and nitrogen cycling and removal. The results of the project will guide and support the success of future restoration efforts on Long Island, the website said.

Officials Warn of Blue-Green Algae Found in Huntington Bay Pond

Suffolk County health officials announced the findings of cyanobacteria blooms, more commonly known as blue-green algae, in Willow Pond in Huntington Bay. It's the first recorded bloom this year, officials said, and now they're warning residents not to swim or even wade in the pond and to keep children and pets from the area, due to the health risks the blooms pose. The area affected includes an overflow box near the shoreline, about 200 feet west of Vineyard Road in Huntington Bay, officials said.

Cyanobacteria are a naturally formed group of photosynthetic oxygen-producing bacteria that produce a range of toxins, known as cyanotoxins, that are harmful to animals and humans. Willow Pond has had prior outbreaks, and health officials warn if contact does occur to rinse with clean water immediately and to seek medical attention if you have symptoms of infection. Those symptoms include: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea; skin, eye or throat irritation; or, allergic reactions and breathing difficulties.

To find the status of all fresh waters in New York State, access the state Department of Environmental Conservation website at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/96801.html>. For more information on algae blooms, go to: <https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/bluegreenalgae/>.

State Allows Procurement of Another Big Block of Offshore Wind Energy



Even as the federal government continues a prolonged review of the impact of wind-energy turbines in federal waters, New York State approved another big solicitation for offshore wind energy. The state Public Service Commission authorized the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to procure at least 1,000 megawatts more of offshore wind energy, with the ability to boost the amount to upward of 2,500 megawatts if pricing and other terms are "sufficiently compelling," the PSC said.

It's the second big round of offshore wind buys planned by the state. Last year, NYSERDA approved two bids for more than 1,700 megawatts of offshore wind to be completed in 2024, enough to power more than one million homes. The commission cited sharp price declines in authorizing the purchase. The state has a goal of 9,000 megawatts of offshore wind by 2035.

The move comes as the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management continues a cumulative impact study of offshore wind on fishing and shipping, a review of a project called Vineyard Wind that had been expected to be completed last year, even as it processes paperwork for a dozen other projects. The Trump administration has been criticized for giving low priority to offshore wind in favor of fossil-fuel energy sources.

Green-energy advocates applauded the state's move. Joe Martens, director of the New York Offshore Wind Alliance, an industry group, said quick action by the PSC "will help ensure that New York is able to take maximum advantage of expiring federal tax credits, limited offshore lease areas, and the developing offshore wind supply chain.

East Hampton Town Sues Over Contamination Linked to Firefighting Foam

East Hampton Town is suing one of its own villages and fire departments over the use of fire suppression foam containing perfluorinated compounds, chemical linked to reproductive and other health impacts, at its Wainscott airport and the subsequent contamination of nearby drinking wells. The town filed a lawsuit on April 13 in U.S. Eastern District Court in Central Islip seeking a court action compelling East Hampton Village, which operates East Hampton fire department, to disclose all locations where the foam was stored and used. The town is also seeking unspecified damages related to the cleanup.

In May, the state Department of Environmental Conservation added a portion of the East Hampton Airport property to its Registry of Inactive Hazardous Waste Disposal Sites, a move that requires the town to investigate and remedy the contamination. That cost could total tens of millions of dollars, according to the complaint, and the town is seeking compensation from the village's insurer, American Alternative Insurance Corporation.

Representatives of the fire department could not be reached for comment, but East Hampton Village administrator Rebecca Molinaro Hansen said in a statement that "the village is dismayed that the town has decided to subject the volunteers of our fire department and taxpayers to this continued litigation."

Aqueous film-forming foam made through 2001 can contain perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), which studies have shown can cause reproductive, developmental, liver and other health impacts, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. The East Hampton Fire Department used the foam for training purposes and to fight fires at the airport between one and 10 times from 2007 until 2017, according to a survey filed with the DEC. The DEC in 2018 released a "site characterization report" of East Hampton Airport that found historic use and storage of firefighting foam at the site had impacted groundwater.

The chemicals were detected in more than 200 private wells in nearby Wainscott, and the town undertook a multimillion-dollar project to extend water mains, bringing public water access to more than 500 homes.

Odor Prompts Move-In Delays at East Hampton Condo Complex

The move-in dates for a 12-unit East Hampton Town affordable housing complex have been delayed for months while the town works to resolve lingering construction issues on the long-awaited project. Officials heralded the completion of the owner-occupied “manor house” condominium complex on Accabonac Road in December, the first of its kind in the town, and said residents were expected to move in within weeks but an appraiser working for a bank lending some mortgages for the units, noticed an odor in the basements during an inspection, town officials said in December. The bank said it would require an environmental firm to certify the air quality was acceptable before moving forward with the loans. That has not yet happened.

Projects like this one offer an affordable solution for low- and middle-income earners priced out of the Hamptons real estate market, where the median sale price is about \$1 million. Affordable housing projects can also take many years to complete, and the manor house is the first affordable complex opened in East Hampton Town since 2012. The town suspects spray foam insulation in the buildings’ basements is the cause of the latest delay, as the odor appears to be emanating from that level and different insulation was used in other parts of the homes.

Three air tests — two conducted by the town in December and February and one by the developer in April — detected a variety of volatile organic compounds in the buildings. VOCs, which are emitted through gasses and are a common byproduct of new construction, had dissipated in most units by the most recent test. However, one unit remained “out of compliance,” according to a town board resolution.

Councilwoman Sylvia Overby, the board’s affordable housing liaison, said the issue would likely be rectified and that the town was acting out of abundance of caution. She said the town would take the lessons learned in developing the manor house and apply them to other upcoming affordable housing projects.