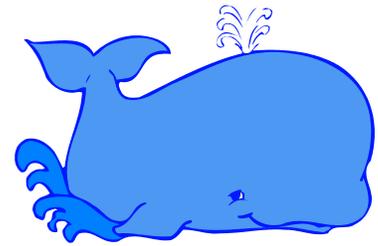


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February 2020 Report

District Officials Announce Closure of Northport Middle School for the Rest of the School Year

School district officials announced that Northport Middle School will be closed for the rest of the school year amid concerns from parents and students about a foul smell inside the building. The middle school on Middleville Road closed for the rest of the year as the district investigates an odor parents say is making their children sick.

Parents have been calling for the closure of the school for years. Testing by an environmental firm found elevated levels of mercury outside the building. Eighth grade students will go to the high school, seventh grade students were relocated to East Northport Middle School and sixth grade students are going to Norwood Avenue Elementary School.

The state Health Department has launched an investigation into health concerns in the Northport-East Northport School district. It was prompted by a group of students who graduated from the high school in 2016 and were all diagnosed with a similar form of cancer.

Parents received a letter from the district superintendent, saying the Health Department's probe will focus on the "entire geographical region of the school district." The letter goes on to say this "did not have any impact" on the decision to close the middle school.

P.W. Grosser Consulting also conducted testing. The group announced its findings at a school board meeting. "In one pool we found 16,000 parts per billion," says Paul Boyce, of P.W. Grosser Consulting. "The other one we found 11,000 parts per billion. The Suffolk County action level is 120 parts per billion. P.W. Grosser Consulting says it expects to have a full report on the testing completed by March.

States Plastic Bag Ban to Begin March 1st

The state's ban on plastic bags takes effect March 1. The goal is to remove plastic from the waste stream. Many of the bags end up as roadside litter or in waterways. But the state is still grappling with the issue of allowing thicker plastic bags, which are more durable and people might re-use over again

Environmental groups don't like that idea. "Our goal is for people to use truly reusable bags, the ones that can be used hundreds of times," said Jordan Christensen, of Citizens Campaign for the Environment. "So if you're giving out a free bag at a register, even if it's slightly thicker than the ones you normally see, most people aren't really reusing those."

Under the law, counties have the option of allowing stores to sell paper bags for 5 cents each. Suffolk County did opt to allow that, but Nassau County did not opt in.

Scientists Say: Parasites Are Killing Off Scallops in the Peconic Bay

The New York state Department of Environmental Conservation and marine scientists have discovered that a parasite is the reason why scallops in Peconic Bay have died. Stony Brook University scientists along with the Environmental Conservation Department have identified a parasite that infects the kidneys of the scallops. They say this led to a massive die-off in the bay. Scientists say there is still a lot more to learn about the parasite.

Town of Southampton Considering A Helium Balloon Ban

A balloon ban could be on its way to Long Island, with the Town of Southampton prepared to float the idea to its residents. Southampton has already passed a ban on plastic straws and Styrofoam containers -- next up could be helium balloons. The town is considering a proposal that would prohibit the sale of helium balloons at places like party stores and supermarkets. The idea is to cut down on balloons ending up on the ground, at beaches and in the water where wildlife can eat them and choke to death.

New York Marine Rescue Center in Riverhead treat lots of sea turtles, seals and other animals, many of which have been injured by balloons or plastic. A balloon or a bag or anything like that in the water can look like a food source. The animals mistake it for something they'd normally eat and then ingest it. Town officials say they'll conduct a poll among town residents to see how they feel about the proposal before acting on it. Similar legislation has passed in other states, but it's believed Southampton would be the first in New York to pass a ban on helium balloons.