



Stephanie Gurin
Environment Chair – Advocacy Team
stephieg@optonline.net
environment@suffolkpta.org

January 2020 Report

[New York State Health Department: There Are No Cancer Clusters at Bellport School Near the Brookhaven Landfill](#)

A new report from the New York State Health Department says there is no cancer cluster at the Frank P. Long Intermediate School in Bellport after years of residents' complaints. Current and former staff members of the school have been concerned for years that the Brookhaven Landfill, which is less than a mile away from the school, has been making them sick. The report looked at 31 people who have worked in the school building over the past few decades. It found that there were 13 different cancers that were diagnosed between 1980 & 2017 and breast cancer was the most common. However, the state's conclusion of its report states that, "Based on the information available to us and our comparative review of confirmed cancer cases, the number and pattern of cancer diagnoses do not appear unusual."

Parent and community members are frustrated by the fact that scientists are proving over and over again that the exposure to toxic chemicals causes cancer. Conversely, there is a disconnect when the Health Department is not finding a link between exposure of toxics and cancer. So, there's a disconnect there and it's the disconnect that actually puts the public in danger. The Bellport Teachers Association said in a statement, "Over the past several years, members of the Bellport Teachers Association have devoted much time and effort advocating for students and staff at Frank P. Long Intermediate School. Although the recent report

released by the NYS Department of Health indicates there is not a cancer cluster in the school, it does not alter the fact that students and staff have been diagnosed with serious illnesses. We acknowledge the amount of work the Department of Health put into this cancer review and appreciate their willingness to present the findings to the Frank P. Long staff. We understand the difficulty in proving cancer clusters, however, cancer is only one of the illnesses diagnosed at Frank P. Long. As a union, we will continue to advocate in the interest for our students and staff, past and present."

The South Country School District posted the state report on its website but made no further comments.

Foul Odors in Northport Middle School Are Making Students Sick

Parents in Northport held a rally and had their children participate in a "sick out" after they say that there are noxious odors at the Northport Middle School. An inspection back in April of 2017 found that 2 dozen hazardous materials were stored in a warehouse underneath a classroom. Students said that they were feeling sick as a result of the odors. Those chemicals have since been removed though parents say they believe the building is still contaminated. Air quality testing was done and no problems were found. Teachers say something in the building has been making them sick for decades. School officials say it is due to a new HVAC system.

The Northport School Board voted unanimously to hire an environmental firm to investigate and get down to the bottom of the odors parents say are making their children sick at Northport Middle School. Parents voiced their concerns, saying that they keep pulling their children out of school due to the fumes inside the building. Some say they want the middle school shut down until they find the cause of the odor. The company will test the soil, air quality and interview children about their symptoms. The decision to hire the firm stems from recommendations from a committee comprised of parents, teachers and administrators.

For four decades, parents have been complaining to the school board that the teachers and students are getting sick and they are requesting answers. During the rally, protesters held pictures of sick children and of others who have died from rare forms of cancer. Parents say other students suffer from asthma, headaches and vomiting. One parent says tests showed that her daughter had high levels of carbon monoxide in her blood that were equivalent to a two-pack-a-day smoker. Once the student was transferred to another middle school in the district, her levels have gone back to normal.

UPDATE - Tests Show Mercury Levels Not Detected In The Air At Northport Middle School

On Thursday, January 9th, parents packed the Northport School Board meeting to find out whether or not there are any mercury levels in the air at Northport Middle School. According to the tests conducted by an environmental firm hired by the district, there were no mercury levels detected in the air at the school. However, elevated mercury levels were found outside the school. The testing firm also found low levels for pesticides and arsenic by the school's track.

So far the school has closed three classrooms near where the mercury was found. The school board says students will be moved out of the building if it can be proved that the mercury is indeed causing people to get sick. There may be some link to mercury that was used in science classes at the school decades ago. Parents say even though levels weren't found in the air they are still concerned. Some parents think the kids should be moved out of the building regardless. Officials say anyone who is concerned should go for a blood or urine test.

What's In The Water? A Recap: Experts Say 1,4-dioxane Threatens Drinking Water Supply

A cancer-causing chemical has been found in unusually high levels in Long Island's drinking water supply. 1,4 dioxane has been found in higher numbers in Long Island water compared to the rest of the U.S. during

testing. Many believe that one of the reasons 1,4 dioxane was discovered in higher levels was because Long Island was the epicenter in manufacturing of commercial degreasers in the past.

Environmental advocates say the problem isn't just in our past, as the chemical can be found in household products used every day like bath gel, laundry soap and dish soap. There are currently no federal standards for acceptable amounts of 1,4 dioxane in drinking water, even though the effects are potentially deadly. The chemical can cause liver, kidney, nasal cavity, breast or skin cancer. Pat Halpin, chairman of the Suffolk Water Authority, says its lab began testing for the presence of 1,4 dioxane in the early 2000s. The lab is required by law to test for 149 contaminants. The Suffolk Water Authority tested for 400 contaminants, resulting in 16,000 results in 2018. Raw groundwater is brought to the facility where it is isolated, combined with a solvent then analyzed to determine the presence of 1,4 dioxane.

The state is proposing reducing the levels of 1,4 dioxane drastically in 2020 and water officials say the timetable is unreasonable. Environmentalists argue that the push is necessary. Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation banning the sale of household products containing 1,4 dioxane in January of 2020.

What's In The Water?: Removing 1,4 Dioxane From Water

New York State is expected to set "first in the nation" regulations for cancer-causing chemical 1,4 dioxane. Most people do not think they have to worry about their families drinking water from the tap. However, when one learns about the higher presence of 1,4 dioxane in groundwater, they are becoming concerned since drinking water is a common variable among everyone that calls Long Island home.

Reducing the levels of 1,4 dioxane is championed by both water officials and environmental advocates. The Suffolk County Water Authority installed the first advanced oxidation process in Central Islip. It is now looking to install 31 more countywide.

Suffolk Water Chief: 1,4-Dioxane Filters Will Come At A 'Tremendous Cost'

Officials from across Long Island recently met at the Suffolk Water Authority in Hauppauge to discuss how to combat 1,4-dioxane – a chemical found in Long Island's drinking water that could be linked to significant health risks. The cost to install treatment facilities around Long Island would be about \$840 million. Unfortunately, Long Island is hundreds of millions of dollars short to be able to treat the water. The state has only set aside \$200 million for the project, which leaves the residents footing the rest of the bill unless something can be done to increase the money from the state.

Multiple water districts and the Town of Hempstead have filed federal lawsuits to hold industrial manufactures responsible for the cost of removing 1,4 dioxane. The state health department says once regulations are implemented, they'll go into effect immediately. Suffolk Water Authority CEO Jeff Szabo says, "They are planning to install filters to get rid of the chemical, but it will come at a cost. We want to make it clear to our elected officials that we need assistance from the state to offset those costs. Depending on which district you're living in, setting a regulation for this contaminant could increase rates two or three times."

A Suffolk water treatment plant removes 1,4-dioxane in two steps. First, water travels down a device, gets treated with hydrogen peroxide and ultraviolet light, and then it gets sent into these large carbon filters, which remove the rest of the contaminants. The Environmental Protection Agency has labeled 1,4-dioxane as a probable carcinogen and now the state is planning to limit the acceptable concentration of 1,4-dioxane to one part per billion, meaning hundreds of water treatment machines would have to be built. Water providers are asking state officials to wait up to three years before imposing limits on 1,4-dioxane but environmentalists call that move unacceptable.

Without new regulation, officials say Long Island's tap water is still safe to drink. However, it's unclear at this point if more state money will be available for Long Island water districts. We need our elected officials on both sides of the aisle to push for additional funds.

Gov. Cuomo Outlines \$3B Plan To Restore And Preserve New York's Environment

Gov. Andrew Cuomo outlined an ambitious \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act in the State of the State address. He said the Restore Mother Nature Bond Act aims to "restore fisheries and streams and wetlands and conserve more forest areas." "We must restore fisheries and streams and wetlands, and conserve more forest areas," he said during the address. "We must replant more trees, we must filter more drinking water and we must stop the nitrogen runoffs."

The Bond Act would bolster flood protection, purchase and preserve open space, create four more artificial reefs in the Long Island Sound and in the Atlantic Ocean and expand renewable energy such as wind power. This is the first environmental bond act in 24 years, despite the state's \$6 billion deficit. The Bond Act is slated to be up for a vote this November if it's approved by the state Legislature.