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Inside Explore!

TOP STORIES

Panel: Billions for dioxane's removal

Council using EPA threshold as starting point

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY
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The state Drinking Water Quality Council, charged with recommending a safe standard for the chemical 1,4-dioxane, estimated Monday that removing the emerging contaminant could cost water suppliers in New York billions of dollars in capital spending and millions more each year to operate and maintain treatment systems.

The man-made 1,4-dioxane is found in trace amounts throughout Long Island's drinking water and the highest detection in the nation was measured at a well in Hicksville.

Chronic exposure to .35 parts per billion of 1,4-dioxane represents a 1-in-a-million cancer risk, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the panel, which met in Manhattan, is using that threshold as a starting point for discussions, members said.

"It's judged that 1-in-a-million is pretty protective," Thomas K.G. Mohr, a consultant and former senior hydrogeologist in California who was not at the meeting. "That's an effort to nearly eliminate the risk."

If the council recommended a level of .35 parts per billion for 1,4-dioxane, treatment would be required on 1,685 wells in New York, costing an estimated \$2.5 billion plus annual operations and maintenance fees of nearly \$253 million, said Brad Hutton, a deputy commissioner in the state Department of Health's Office of Public Health. At 3.5 parts per billion, costs are estimated at \$897 million, plus \$62.6 million in annual costs.

The bulk of the costs would be incurred in Nassau and Suffolk, which far outpaced the rest of the state in the rate of dioxane detection.

"It could double the cost of



At center, Drinking Water Quality Council member Paul Granger, of Port Washington, speaks Monday. CHARLES ECKERT

THE PRICE TAG FOR WATER CLEANUP

For a level in parts per billion of ...	Which would require treatment for this many wells in NY State ...	The total state capital cost would be ...
0.07	2,663	\$3.995B
0.35	1,685	\$2.527B
1.0	1,087	\$1.631B
3.5	598	\$897M

Source: NY State

water on Long Island," said Dennis Kelleher, spokesman for Long Island Water Conference, a coalition of more than 50 water suppliers and industry professionals. "If we're talking about hundreds of these in Nassau and Suffolk, certainly we're going to need some grant money to control costs."

In a daylong discussion, members of the panel — appointed by the governor or state Legislature — balanced the health impacts, economic burden and ability of water suppliers to get treatment in place. Later, in March, they will hold a special meeting with the goal of recommending a specific level for Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker to consider.

"No decision has been

made," said Stan Carey, a council member who is superintendent of Massapequa Water District. ".35 is used by many people. That starts the conversation is all it really does."

Steve Risotto, senior director for the industry-backed American Chemistry Council in Washington, urged the panel to wait for an EPA risk analysis and another study in Canada to be completed before making a decision. "Wait until they finish," he said. "This will allow you to collect more data."

The state last set a drinking water regulation in 2004 for the gasoline additive MBTE. The limit, 10 parts per billion, represents a 1-in-a-million cancer risk, state Health Department research scientist Lloyd

Wilson said.

Used as a solvent stabilizer and present as a byproduct in personal care products, 1,4-dioxane is classified as a probable carcinogen because it behaves as a tumor promoter in laboratory animals, said Mohr, who wrote a book about investigating and remediating 1,4-dioxane sites.

Several states have set regulations, notice levels or action concentrations for 1,4-dioxane ranging from 0.3 parts per billion in Massachusetts to 77 parts per billion in Alaska, according to an EPA fact sheet.

The range reflects the level of uncertainty about the risks of exposure, experts say. Most data are based on animal tests, which don't always correlate into human effects.