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Newsday (USPS# 701-470) (ISSN# 0278-5587) is published weekly by Newsday LLC, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, N.Y. 11747. Periodicals postage paid at Huntington Station, N.Y. Postmaster: Send address changes to 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, N.Y. 11747.

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TOP STORIES



The Suffolk County Water Authority ran a pilot test, using ultraviolet lamps, above, in its ultraviolet reactor at its pump station in Central Islip.

NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

Technology for safer water

Suffolk agency first to get NY nod for method to remove likely carcinogen

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY
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The Suffolk County Water Authority is the first supplier in New York to get state approval to use new technology that removes the probable carcinogen 1,4-dioxane from drinking water.

Suffolk County Water Authority Chairman Jim Gaughran said treatment would be activated at the Commercial Boulevard well site in Central Islip as soon as possible.

Used as a solvent stabilizer, the man-made chemical is also present as a byproduct in many personal-care products and has been found in trace amounts throughout Long Island's drinking-water supplies.

The chemical is not regulated federally but last year the state said it would set its own specific standard for 1,4-dioxane; those limits are expected to be discussed Monday during a state Drinking Water Quality Council meeting in Manhattan.

"We will continue to advance the latest treatment technologies to ensure our public drinking water systems are safeguarded

from these unregulated chemicals that threaten the health of citizens and the environment," Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said in a news release announcing the approval of the Suffolk system.

Gaughran said the authority, which serves 1.2 million people, would work with other water suppliers interested in the technology, which uses ultraviolet light and an oxidizer to break down 1,4-dioxane.

"Once it's done once, then it's pretty easy to get the approval of other facilities," Gaughran said.

Brad Hutton, a deputy commissioner in the state Department of Health's Office of Public Health, called the approval an exciting advancement. "It sets the stage for additional systems on Long Island," he said.

The treatment approved came after Suffolk water ran a pilot test in 2017. The approval applies just to the one well site in Central Islip and is conditioned on Suffolk County Water Authority following enhanced monitoring requirements.

Using the technology elsewhere in the district will require separate approvals, but that

process should be expedited because the state conducted a thorough review of the water authority's system, Hutton said. The approval in Suffolk could also speed things up for other districts.

"This is a giant step forward in solving the 1,4-dioxane contamination issue," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Farmingdale-based Citizens Campaign for the Environment. "It's opening the door to setting a drinking water standard and allowing people's drinking water to be safer and cleaner. It's a relief to have this step taken."

Every five years the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requires all large suppliers and a sampling of smaller suppliers to test for unregulated contaminants that could pose public health threats. The latest round, the results of which were released in 2016, shined a spotlight on Long Island.

In the national survey, nearly 7 percent of suppliers with detections of 1,4-dioxane saw concentrations that present a low but elevated risk of developing cancer — quantified as affecting one out of every million people experiencing chronic exposure. On Long Island, 71 percent of suppliers with detections saw levels at that same risk; and Hicksville

Water District had the highest detection in the nation.

Hicksville Water District Superintendent Anthony Iannone said he was encouraged by news of the approval of the Suffolk technology. His district plans to install a treatment similar to that used by SCWA at its well field that had the high 1,4-dioxane hit. A request to run a pilot test has been submitted to Nassau County, which is required before seeking formal state approval.

"It will definitely help us if there is a treatment system out there in the market that has been approved," he said.

The SCWA last year estimated installing treatment could cost \$500,000 to \$900,000 per site depending on conditions. Gaughran said the district's plan right now is to only use the treatment at that one well site.

With the state approval, other districts could be beginning to plan for their own projects, knowing that a drinking water standard could be on the horizon, said Rich Humann, president and chief executive of H2M Architects + Engineers, a Melville engineering firm that represents water suppliers.

"The process is set," he said, "it's really going to be about the dollars."