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LETTER REPLY TO SENATOR LETTER DATED 7 APRIL 2011 REGARDING CONTAMINATED GROUNDWATER PLUME EMANATING FROM NWIRP BETHPAGE NY
03/29/2010
U S EPA REGION II

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 2
290 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

MAY - 5 2011

Honorable Charles Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-3203

Dear Senator Schumer:

Thank you for your letter of April 7, 2011, jointly addressed to the Secretary of the Navy, to Administrator Jackson of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and to Commissioner Martens of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, regarding the findings of a recent review by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the EPA of the existing groundwater model of the plume emanating from the former Navy-Grumman facility in Nassau County, New York.

As you note, the current groundwater model is not sufficient for predicting the flow of groundwater at extended distances from the source of the contamination. A more robust groundwater model combined with other tools, such as tracers and collection of real data would provide a better characterization of the flow of contamination at greater distances from the source. We anticipate that the Navy's optimization review of the selected remedy for the western plume of off-site contamination will provide additional recommendations on improving the groundwater model, as well as recommending the use of other additional tools for assessing groundwater contamination.

Importantly, the model was not used to select the remedy but rather was used as one of many tools to help characterize the plume's nature and scope. Concerns with the model do not mean that the remedy was not, or is not, appropriate. It is also important to note that the December discussion draft referenced in your letter was superseded by the final USGS report.

EPA Region 2 is advancing a number of strategies to help us better implement remedies by expanding the extent of available information regarding the contamination. First, we have begun an initiative to require facilities, such as the Navy and Northrop-Grumman, to use an electronic data deliverable system to submit groundwater data in a 3-dimensional electronic format. This will enable us to build our database of groundwater quality information on Long Island, thus improving our understanding of the extent and movement of groundwater contamination. We look forward to continuing our work on this strategy for both the Navy-Grumman study area as well as all of Nassau County. Second, we are working in conjunction with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Navy on the placement of outpost monitoring wells, which will improve our knowledge of where the contamination is with respect to water supply wells.

Finally, the USGS report noted that the spread of contamination could be influenced by seasonal pumping stresses, including the summer pumpage at water supply wells, which may be more than 10 times greater than winter pumpage. With this in mind, I would like to bring to your attention several successful voluntary community water conservation programs that EPA is overseeing. Among these programs are the Water Sense Program (http://www/epa.gov/watersense/) and the Water Champions Program. We encourage local governments and community groups in Nassau County to participate in these water conservation programs, which could help save taxpayer dollars while also helping to slow the movement of groundwater contamination.

If you have any questions, please let me know or your staff may contact Mike McGowan, Acting Chief for Intergovernmental and Community Affairs, at 212-637-3657.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Enck

Judith A. Enck
Regional Administrator

cc: Honorable Ray Mabus, Secretary of Navy
Commissioner Joe Martens, NYSDEC
Gerry Petrella, Long Island District Director, Office of Senator Schumer