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Call for EPA help on toxic plume cleanup

September 19, 2011 by JENNIFER SMITH / jennifer.smith@newsday.com



Sen. Charles [Schumer](#) and local water district officials called Monday for the EPA to intervene in the ongoing cleanup of hazardous waste from the former Grumman naval weapons plant in [Bethpage](#), citing the threat to drinking water for an estimated 250,000 residents.

At issue is a vast plume of industrial solvents that dates back to the manufacture of military planes there decades earlier. Traveling south through groundwater, the contamination has fouled five public drinking water wells and is now some 2,350 acres in size, according to the state [Department of Environmental Conservation](#), which is in charge of the cleanup.

Officials with the [Bethpage](#), [Massapequa](#) and [South Farmingdale](#) water districts -- whose wells stand in the pollution's path -- want the Navy to embark on a more sweeping cleanup. They said the contamination is moving more quickly toward water supplies than Navy reports had indicated, and they want more testing to determine the full extent of the plume.

"If we have the EPA take this over, they will make the cleanup happen," John Caruso of the [Massapequa](#) Water District said at a news conference outside district headquarters.

It was not clear Monday just what form that intervention might take.

Asked whether a federal takeover was possible, the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) said in a statement: "This has been a complicated and long-term problem that needs the focused attention of all levels of government," adding that the agency, working with the DEC, "will play an active role and do everything possible to address this legacy of toxic pollution."

Last year, Schumer (D-N.Y.) convened a team to evaluate cleanup efforts in light of the districts' concerns.

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The group included officials from DEC, EPA, the Navy, [Northrop Grumman](#) and the U.S. Geological Survey as well as outside engineers.

Monday Schumer expressed impatience with the pace of those efforts and said [Northrop Grumman](#) and its former defense client needed to formalize an agreement on how to pay for any EPA-led cleanup.

"I'm getting the sense that the Navy might be dragging its feet," Schumer said, "and I'm getting the sense that might be deliberate."

Navy and Northrop Grumman representatives said all efforts were being made to clean up the pollution in a timely fashion, but they did not comment on Schumer's proposal.

A report issued in June by the interagency group reviewing the cleanup recommended examining the costs and feasibility of containing the plume at its leading edge.

Water suppliers want the Navy to remove as much contamination as possible by pumping up polluted groundwater to prevent it from hitting an additional 29 drinking water wells.

Navy spokesman Thomas Kreidel said that the group's evaluation of the containment option should be ready for "initial review" by the year's end.

But DEC officials, citing details in the same report, said Monday that fully containing the plume "is not feasible in view of the massive volume of groundwater that would need to be pumped, treated and disposed of and the limited space available to do that."

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