

CHARLES E. SCHUMER
NEW YORK

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

COMMITTEES:
JOINT ECONOMIC
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April 07, 2011

The Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
U.S. Department of the Navy
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350

The Honorable Lisa P. Jackson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Commissioner Joseph Martens
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233- 1010

Dear Secretary Mabus, Administrator Jackson, and Commissioner Martens:

I write to you today regarding the findings of a recent review I requested of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that confirms current modeling for a toxic groundwater plume emanating from a former Navy-Grumman manufacturing site in Nassau County, New York does not adequately assess potential impacts to as many as 25 public wells that supply water to over 160,000 Nassau County residents. As you know, I have written to you in the past to urge you to develop an improved clean-up plan to prevent contamination of water wells that would require local Nassau taxpayers to pursue expensive water treatment strategies.

This new USGS report confirms a preliminary memorandum issued by the EPA in December 2010 that answered the question “is the groundwater model reliable and appropriate for use to address downgradient impacts” with a clear and concise “no.” EPA’s 2010 draft report also noted that the Navy modeling should “not be used to attempt to make a reliable prediction of the potential impacts on the public supply wells downgradient of the sources of groundwater contamination.” It goes on to state that “[t]he groundwater model was not adequately initially designed to address these questions and is not a model that can be simply modified and used for applications of this nature.”

Today's USGS findings highlight major flaws of this years-old modeling conducted by the Navy and its government contractor, Northrop-Grumman. The report states that their approach "ignores information on temporal variation of several factors, including public-supply pumping and groundwater discharges from systems remediating VOC plumes." The fact that the Navy and Northrop-Grumman continue to rely on this flawed model is simply unacceptable to the thousands of people counting on the federal and state government to insure that the necessary remedies are in place and ready to be undertaken in a timely fashion to protect their drinking water and prevent massive rate hikes.

There is no longer any doubt that both the regulatory oversight of this plume and the remediation and treatment strategies to protect water suppliers have been severely lacking in scope and immediacy. Therefore, I urge you to incorporate these new findings into the on-going Navy, EPA, and DEC optimization review due to be completed this summer. The goal of the review is to optimize the implementation of the groundwater remedy at the Bethpage site. The final report will evaluate the effectiveness of previous and ongoing treatments and the effectiveness of the current well network in monitoring the progress of the plume. To that end, the optimization review must issue implementable recommendations to improve the modeling and contain and remediate contamination wherever it is technically feasible.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my Long Island Office at 631-753-0978.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator