

**WATCHDOG**

**ONLY IN NEWSDAY**

# STRUGGLE TO PURIFY LI'S WATER

Efforts to treat 3 potentially cancerous pollutants delayed by supply-chain snarls, soaring costs, Newsday survey finds

A2-5 | VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV



RANCEE DADDOVA



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## TOP STORIES

# PUSH TO IMPROVE

## Supply chain woes, cost hikes, need for new systems hamper fight against key pollutants

BY CRAIG SCHNEIDER  
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Efforts to treat three potentially cancerous pollutants in Long Island's drinking water face significant delays because of supply-chain snarls, soaring costs and the need to build more than 100 water treatment systems, according to a Newsday survey of water providers.

The Island has about 50 public water providers, and some have treatment systems up and running to address the three "emerging contaminants," while others remain in the planning and construction stages.

The costs of building these systems have increased significantly in recent years. For example, water providers say the cost of carbon — an integral ingredient in water filtration systems — has doubled in the past few years, and a national demand for it has delayed orders.

Some costs are being passed on to ratepayers.

"The construction of these systems is very, very costly, and the operation is very costly," said Dennis Kelleher, chairman of the public relations committee for the Long Island Water Conference, a trade group of local water suppliers. "We think the raw cost of delivering the water will go up 50 to 100 percent."

Two years have passed since New York implemented limits on the three emerging contaminants: 1,4-dioxane, perfluorooctane sulfonic acid, or PFOS, and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA. They are referred to as "forever chemicals" because they break down slowly in water and soil, and accumulate and persist in the human body.

Testing has found 1,4-dioxane — an industrial chemical in paint strippers, dyes and some deodorants and shampoos — in more than 70% of public water wells on Long Island. Long-term exposure has been linked to kidney and liver damage and

## WHAT TO KNOW

- **Long Island's efforts to treat three** potentially cancerous pollutants in drinking water face delays due to supply-chain problems, cost increases and the need to build more than 100 water treatment systems.
- **Some water providers have treatment systems** up and running, with more to come, while others remain in the planning and construction stages.
- **Two years have passed since New York** implemented limits on the three emerging contaminants: 1,4-dioxane, PFOA and PFOS. They are referred to as "forever chemicals" because they break down slowly in water and soil, and accumulate and persist in the human body.

providers have asked for extensions to implement changes.

Some Island water providers have begun passing the cleanup costs on to customers in increased water rates and added surcharges. For example, the Suffolk County Water Authority added an \$80-per-year surcharge in January 2020. The Greenlawn Water District added an \$80 annual surcharge and raised rates, and the Village of Sands Point has begun charging a \$225 capital fee every three months to all property owners.

"Long Islanders have this idea that water is cheap. It's not going to be like that anymore," said Peter Hesse, a commissioner of the Glenwood Water District.

The building of these water treatment systems has forced some suppliers to pump water at reduced capacity and required residents to conserve water. The Port Washington Water District is constructing treatment systems at three of its facilities to address detections of 1,4-dioxane, PFOA and PFOS in some of the wells. Some will come online next summer and others by mid-2024.

Residents there have been required to follow the district's water conservation guidelines to save the 20% needed to maintain the system, officials said.

These water treatment projects mark one of the most expensive and labor-intensive infrastructure undertakings on Long Island, with total costs expected to exceed \$1.5 billion, according to the Long Island Water Conference. Water suppliers emphasize that these costs only include building the treatment systems, and that operating them also will be expensive and likely lead to higher costs for customers.

The state has awarded about \$400 million statewide in grant money to help offset the costs, with more than half coming to Long Island.

Long Island water suppliers

cancer, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Limits on 1,4-dioxane in cosmetics, personal care and household cleaning products go into effect Dec. 31.

PFOS and PFOA — chemicals used in nonstick and stain-resistant materials and firefighting foam — have been found in hundreds of public and private wells on the Island. Exposure to PFOS or PFOA can damage the immune system, the cardiovascular system, human development and cause cancer, the EPA said.

PFOS and PFOA have been voluntarily phased out by U.S. manufacturers. The EPA proposed in August to designate the two synthetic chemicals as harmful substances. If that proposal is approved, releases of PFOA and PFOS that exceed a certain level would have to be reported to authorities, who could require cleanups.

The state approved the limits on these three contaminants in July 2020, though many water



# LI'S WATER RUNS INTO DELAYS



Water District Superintendent Paul Granger says Hicksville got a head start on designing water treatment systems. ■ Video: [newsday.com/li](https://www.newsday.com/li)

**So many water suppliers were impacted by the regulations, and now they are competing for the materials. . . . Our budgets are being eaten away rather quickly.**

— Hicksville Water District Superintendent Paul Granger

said that, despite the presence of these hazardous chemicals in certain wells, they are providing safe drinking water.

Water providers such as the Williston Park Water District and the Village of Bayville said their water meets the state's regulations on emerging contaminants.

"I have zero detections and am not in any violation at all of any of the new [limits]," said Andrew Petti, Bayville's supervisor of water plant operations.

Freeport, as well, has no plan to install treatment systems because the water there is below state limits, public works Superintendent Robert R. Fissenreid said.

### Frustrated by delays

Public officials and water providers acknowledge there have been instances in which providers exceeded state limits, though they said that occurs infrequently. Island environmentalists, while praising the progress on constructing treatment systems, said they're frustrated by the delays in getting them online.

"We worked so hard to get drinking water standards, and we're still waiting two years later to see them fully implemented," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, a nonprofit advocacy group based in Farmingdale.

In July 2020, New York be-

came the first state in the nation to adopt drinking water standards for the contaminant 1,4-dioxane, at 1 part per billion. The state also set drinking water standards for PFOS and PFOA, each at 10 parts per trillion. The amount of PFOS and PFOA permitted in drinking water is so low that it is the equivalent of 10 grains of sand in an Olympic-size swimming pool.

To provide time for the building of treatment systems, the state approved deferrals of up to two years for 21 water providers on Long Island. The 21 providers had wells approaching or exceeding the state limits for the three emerging contaminants. The deferrals allowed them to continue pumping water without receiving violations. Providers said they shut down some troubled wells or blended that water with water from clean wells to lower the level of contaminants below state limits.

This year, at least 17 of those providers requested and received another deferral, some up to a year. They include Garden City Park Water District,

until Sept. 26; Franklin Square Water District, until Dec. 26; Albertson Water District, until next April 25; the Village of Garden City, until next May 26, and South Huntington Water District, until next Aug. 1.

The following water providers have each received a second deferral until next Aug. 26: The Town of Hempstead Water Department; Village of Hempstead; Hicksville; Water Authority of Western Nassau County; Jericho Water District; Incorporated Village of Mineola; Liberty Utilities New York; Merrick; Port Washington; Greenlawn Water District; Riverhead Water District, and Suffolk County Water Authority.

The Greenlawn district has three wells at or near the limit for 1,4-dioxane, but it has not served customers water that exceeds the state standards, Superintendent Bob Santoriello said. Greenlawn was granted a second deferral because construction on its three systems to treat 1,4-dioxane is not expected to be completed until

## 'FOREVER CHEMICALS' 1,4-DIOXANE

- Used as a solvent in a variety of industrial processes, including laboratory chemicals, adhesives, sealants and spray polyurethane foam. It is also a byproduct found in consumer products, including deodorant, shampoo, detergents and soaps.
- About 1 million pounds of 1,4-dioxane are produced a year.
- Found at many federal facilities because of its widespread use as a stabilizer in certain chlorinated solvents, paint strippers, greases and waxes.
- Classified by the EPA as "likely to be carcinogenic to humans."

## PFOS and PFOA

- Both part of a larger group of thousands of chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, which have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s.
- PFAS are used to make coatings for stain and water-resistant products and have been used in firefighting foam, nonstick pans, food packaging like pizza boxes and fast-food wrappers and more.
- PFOS and PFOA, the most studied PFAS chemicals, do not break down easily and persist in the environment.
- Human studies have found associations between PFOA and/or PFOS exposure and effects on the immune system, the cardiovascular system, human development (e.g., decreased birth weight), and cancer.
- Manufacturers have largely voluntarily phased out productions of PFOS and PFOA. However, the EPA in June said replacement chemicals such as GenX and perfluorobutane sulfonate, or PFBS, also carry health risks.

**NOW ONLINE**  
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See **WATER** on A4



# BETTER-WATER EFFORTS ON LI MEET DELAYS

**WATER from A3**

2024, he said.

"We don't plan on having to use the deferral, but it's like an insurance policy," Santoriello said.

## Suppliers: Water is safe

Long Island obtains nearly all its public drinking water from about 1,500 wells connected to underground aquifers, many of which have been polluted with decades of industrial, commercial, agricultural and residential contaminants.

An aquifer is an underground formation typically composed of permeable rock and gravel, sand, pebbles or silt. Aquifers contain, transmit and yield water, according to the Nassau Suffolk Water Commissioners Association. The depth of the Long Island aquifer system is shallowest on the North Shore, about 600 feet, and deepest along the South Shore, about 2,000 feet.

Environmentalists said even traces of these "forever chemicals" in drinking water can be dangerous.

"These contaminants are very prevalent on Long Island, and they are unsafe at any level," said Liz Moran, New York policy advocate for Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law group with several locations in the United States, including New York City.

Moran pointed to the EPA announcement in June that PFOS and PFOA were more dangerous than previously thought and pose health risks even at levels so low they cannot be detected. The agency reduced its threshold for health risks for PFOA and PFOS in drinking water to levels that are more stringent than state standards. The EPA set limits, which are not binding on localities, for

PFOS at .02 parts per trillion and PFOA at .004 parts per trillion.

Water quality advocates said it can be difficult for people to find out if and when the contaminants in their water exceed the state standards.

"That means advocates have to try and pull data or survey individual water utilities, which is tough, because there's 2,000 of them all across the state," said Rob Hayes, director of clean water for the Albany-based nonprofit Environmental Advocates NY. "It makes it really difficult to be able to then track."

Newsday asked the state Department of Health, which oversees public water providers, for the number of times Long Island suppliers exceeded the state limits. State officials said they don't collate such data and suggested contacting county health departments.

Nassau health department officials, asked the same question, referred Newsday to the water providers.

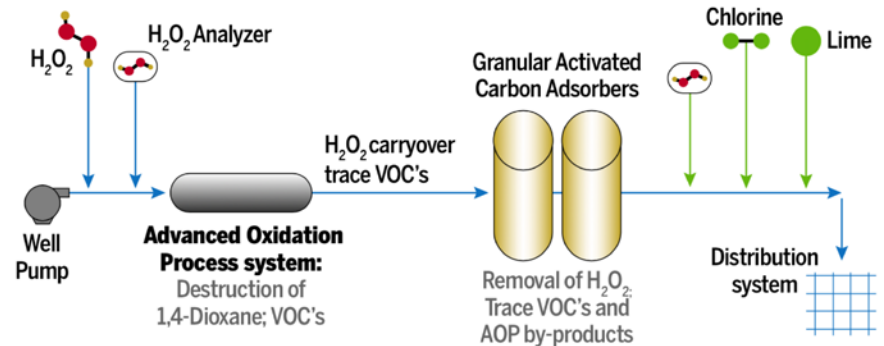
Suffolk health officials, who oversee 1,000 public wells, said instances when water suppliers exceed the state limits are rare. They provided information indicating that recent testing has shown five instances in which water sent to customers exceeded the standards for 1,4-dioxane. The wells were operated by the Suffolk County Water Authority, they said.

Suffolk County Water Authority officials said there were no instances in recent testing in which water sent to customers exceeded the limits for PFOA and PFOS.

The state requires all public water providers to notify customers when they have violated state or federal water standards. They all must issue annual water quality reports as well. Those providers with a de-

## HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

The diagram shows a typical Advanced Oxidation Process system for removal of 1,4-dioxane at a single well.



### PHASE 1

As raw water comes out of the well, it first receives a small dose of hydrogen peroxide, or H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>. The water mixed with the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> then enters an AOP reactor that contains lamps that emit UV light. The UV light converts the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> into a powerful oxidant that destroys the chemical bonds within the 1,4-dioxane molecule.

SOURCE: SUFFOLK COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY | NEWSDAY GRAPHIC BY JESSICA ASBURY



**A treatment system, designed to remove contaminant 1, 4-dioxane from groundwater, at a pump station in Central Islip.**

ferred must test their water and issue reports quarterly. If the provider is in violation for any of the three emerging contaminants, they must notify the public within 30 days.

Since Aug. 26, 2020, when the state limits became effective, no public water supply systems have received a violation in Suffolk, according to the county's health department. A public water system supplies water to the same population year-round.

However, 14 noncommunity public water supply systems have received a violation for exceeding at least one of the new limits. Noncommunity water systems are those that regularly supply water to at least 25 of the same people at least six months per year, or a system that provides water in a place

such as a gas station or campgrounds where people do not remain for long periods.

### Supplier exceeded limits

Tim Hopkins, chief legal officer for the Suffolk County Water Authority, said that since the state standards were adopted, the authority has had 15 instances when measurements showed that drinking water sent to customers exceeded the state standard for 1,4-dioxane. The water was coming from wells in Huntington, East Farmingdale, Kings Park, Fort Salonga, Ronkonkoma and the Village of Northport, he said.

The authority had four instances during that period when drinking water delivered to customers exceeded the limits for PFOA and PFOS, from

### PHASE 2

Any trace remnants of the destruction process are removed by a set of Granular Activated Carbon, or GAC, filters by adsorbing to the GAC filter media.

### PHASE 3

The water leaving the GAC filters is then treated with chlorine and lime before it enters the water distribution system and is delivered to customers.

wells in Nesconset, Westhampton and the Village of the Branch. Those wells since have been connected to treatment systems, Hopkins said.

He noted that any exceedances of the new standards are not violations of the health code because the authority has a state deferral until August 2023.

Testing for PFOA, PFOS and 1,4-dioxane is done at least twice a year at every well, Hopkins said. If a well has a detection of one of these three contaminants, the Suffolk County Water Authority would test the well at least quarterly, he said.

Consequently, it is possible for one of the authority's water systems to pump water in excess of the limits for months, Hopkins said.

"However, I would tend to think that would not likely happen in the real world," Hopkins said. "Typically, you would have a low-level detection first. Then you would be testing at least quarterly. If the quarterly samples showed increases in concentration levels, you would monitor more frequently than quarterly. If you saw you were getting higher concentration levels with that increased frequency, you would likely take the well out of service before the [limit] was exceeded."

In Nassau, 92 public wells required treatment systems for 1,4-dioxane, and 23 of the treatment systems are running, according to the county health department. The county expects



all wells that require treatment — meaning they exceed state limits — to be treated by next August, the department said.

In addition, 46 wells required treatment for PFOA and PFOS, and virtually all are currently being treated, the county said. Several suppliers previously had installed these systems to treat other hazardous substances in their water.

In Suffolk, water providers are planning or installing 45 systems to treat 1,4-dioxane, though some wells where the contaminant was detected were below the state limits, the county's health department said. The systems for wells in excess of the limits are expected to be in use by fall 2023, the department said.

### Cost hikes, delays

Building water treatment systems can take two to three years, from a pilot study to flipping on the switch, said Kelleher, of the Long Island Water Conference. But the industry has been hampered, like many others, with supply-chain problems delaying the receipt of materials.

In addition, the cost of materials has escalated as many water suppliers rush to build systems to address the new pollution standards, driving up demand for materials, he said. These systems require copious amounts of carbon, but increasing demand has driven up prices significantly in the past year, he said.

Newsday sent questions to Island water districts, asking about the number of treatment systems they need, their progress and costs, and the financial impact on customers.

The treatment of PFOA and PFOS requires a Granular Activated Carbon, or GAC, system. The treatment of 1,4-dioxane, which is more difficult, requires an Advanced Oxidation Process, or AOP, system, as well as a GAC system in the finishing process. The price tag for these systems vary depending on the amount of water they treat, but each can cost more than \$1 million, suppliers said.

The Hicksville Water District was among those providers that got a head start, planning treatment systems before the state implemented the new regulations two years ago, district Superintendent Paul Granger said. The district, which serves 48,000 people, had 10 of its 14 wells exceeding the maximum contamination levels for 1,4-dioxane, and two

that exceeded the limit for PFOA and PFOS.

Hicksville plans to install 12 AOP systems and 12 GAC systems at the affected wells. It already has installed seven AOP units and seven GAC systems, Granger said.

Granger said the work schedule was pushed back six months to a year, in part due to delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some manufacturers had shut down for a time, and labor suffered from employees being out due to sickness and quarantines, he said.

"I can sum it up in two words: very challenging," Granger said. "So many water suppliers were impacted by the regulations, and now they are competing for the materials. . . . Our budgets are being eaten away rather quickly."

Granger said the overall costs will be \$76 million, including the treatment units, oxidation tanks, piping, generators and buildings to house the systems. The district already has spent \$30 million and has received approval of \$34.7 million in state grants.

All the Hicksville treatment systems should be running by 2025, Granger said. The district increased water rates in 2020, which officials said should cost customers about \$24 extra a year on their bills.

Materials have been hard to come by, Granger said. Ordering a switch for a backup power system, which usually took three months, has stretched to a year, he said. The costs of carbon jumped from \$1.50 a pound to \$3, which might not sound like a lot, except that one of Hicksville's GAC treatment systems requires 80,000 pounds of it.

That's an additional \$120,000, Granger said.

Newsday asked Island public water suppliers how often they've exceeded the state standards since the new limits were implemented in 2020. The majority said they had not.

Hicksville has not run over the limit for PFOS and PFOA, as the wells that exceed the state standards have been either shut down or had their water mixed with water from clean wells to reduce the level of contamination, Granger said. But Hicksville has exceeded the state standards several times for 1,4-dioxane, according to its reports to the state Health Department. When water from wells consistently tested above the limit, they were taken out of service, according to the reports.

In a June report, water flowed from a well that measured 1.3 parts per billion, more than the limit of 1.0 parts per billion. A treatment system for that well is expected to come online this month, Granger said.

Granger said that, in general, water temporarily exceeding the limit should not greatly concern people. The damage from 1,4-dioxane, he said, comes from accumulation in the human body over many years. It is not an "acute hazard" such as E. coli in the water, which would be "an immediate public health hazard," he said.

"The sky is not falling," Granger said. "We are trying to mitigate long-term exposure."

### Suffolk's big water supplier

The Suffolk County Water Authority is the behemoth of Island providers, with 600 wells serving 1.2 million people. The authority has completed the installation of one AOP system and is in the process of installing another 17 to address wells approaching or exceeding the limit for 1,4-dioxane, Hopkins said.

In the past two years, the authority has installed 21 GAC systems at wells approaching or exceeding the limits for PFOA and PFOS, he said.

However, the authority plans on installing AOP and GAC systems at all its wells that have any detection of these three contaminants, "so that no amount of the contaminant is detected in the water distribution system," Hopkins said. About 275 wells have had detection of 1,4-dioxane, and about 231 wells have had a detection of PFOA and PFOS, he said.

The costs for all this will be several hundred million dollars and take more than a decade, he said. The authority has received \$30 million in state grants.

"We don't want contaminants in our water," Hopkins said. "We didn't put it in. We're just trying to get it out."

Suffolk's water authority is among several Island suppliers suing manufacturers they said are responsible for the contaminants. The water authority has two such lawsuits, Hopkins said. The defendants in one case include: The Dow Chemical Co., Ferro Corp., Vulcan Materials Co., Procter & Gamble Co. and the Shell Oil Co. The defendants in the other include: The 3M Co., Buckeye Fire Equipment Co., Chemguard Inc., Tyco Fire Products LP and National Foam Inc.,

Hopkins said.

The state limits also can present challenges to smaller water systems such as the one in Sands Point, which serves 3,000 people.

The levels of PFOA and PFOS have been rising over time in the local wells behind Village Hall, Mayor Peter Forman said. The amount of contamination in wells can rise and fall as pollutants shift in the soil. Those levels stand at 5 to 8 parts per trillion, below the state limit of 10 parts per trillion, he said.

"If these levels rise to 10 PPT, we would be required to remove these wells from operation within a few weeks' time," Forman said in a May newsletter to residents. "The loss of one of these wells . . . could result in a multi-year-long irrigation moratorium throughout the whole village — an untenable thought."

Consequently, Sands Point is planning a GAC system for the wells behind Village Hall, at a cost of \$6 million. The village

has received approval for a state grant of \$3 million, Forman said, adding that the system should be online within 16 months.

The village likely will need another GAC system for another set of wells, he added.

Moreover, the cost of the treatment unit is draining the village's general budget fund, which prompted the village to raise water rates and begin charging a \$225 fee every three months to all property owners, he said.

Once a treatment system is built, operating it will increase the cost due to the amounts of electricity, chemicals and testing required, said Kelleher, of the Long Island Water Conference.

"It comes down to costs," he said. "A lot of water suppliers have raised their rates to cover these costs, but I don't think we've raised our rates enough to cover the operational costs. . . . It could be upward of \$100,000 per well additional per year to operate."

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<sup>1</sup>All offers subject to credit approval. To receive Reward Points, Member must have an Island Checking Account, Debit Mastercard and enroll in the iChoose Rewards Program at [www.iChooseRewards.com](https://www.iChooseRewards.com). Points will be awarded for purchases at the beginning of each month.  
<sup>2</sup>Available for Island Members. Membership eligibility applies. Federally insured by NCUA