

TOP STORIES

A tougher plume push



The last thing the good people of Levittown want is to spend years fretting about the quality of drinking water — as neighboring Bethpage has done since the discovery, decades ago, of a plume of pollutants from the old Northrop Grumman plant.

Which makes a bill sponsored by Assemb. Joseph Saladino (R-Massapequa), and signed by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo in December, welcome.

The measure directs the state Department of Environmental Conservation to expedite cleanup of the plume, and requires that the agency give

lawmakers a schedule and design timeline to fully remediate the problem.

Which is exactly what Bethpage residents, for decades, have been seeking. And what residents in Levittown and surrounding communities, south of the spreading plume, likely will be pushing for, too.

As a story yesterday by Newsday reporter Emily C. Dooley made clear, the fight against the groundwater plume has been lengthy and difficult — leaving the DEC, the Navy (which once operated the site), Northrop Grumman and local water districts to grapple with soil and groundwater contamination.

And that — for some of the agencies — has been since the 1940s, when the first contaminants were discovered.

Now, officials are treating



YESTERDAY

How Newsday covered the story

drinking water wells as far away as Levittown, which is 4 miles west of the Bethpage facility. In addition, the Navy plans to install 31 more monitoring devices, so officials can attempt to “map” how far the

plume has spread.

Such a “map” would be useful in allowing communities potentially in the plume’s path to be aware, to test or plan mitigation efforts.

As it is, the Town of Hempstead closed wells in Levittown last summer after low concentrations of a refrigerating chemical and a degreasing solvent were discovered, although the levels were within acceptable drinking water standards.

Why the closing? Town officials, no surprise, didn’t want to take a chance, according to the Newsday report.

Saladino, echoing the sentiment of his community, wants New York State to use wells to extract contaminants, treat the water and then reinject it into the aquifers.

It’s a move Nassau County

Executive Edward Mangano — who began his career as a civic activist trying to clean up the plume — supports.

“The community has been dealing with this for a long, long, long, long time and you always feel that more should be done,” he said.

At one point, he said, the goal was to contain the plume — using technology available during the last century.

That, obviously, has not worked. But several impacted communities have turned to air strippers, which remove pollutants from drinking water.

“For me, it has always come down to the same question,” Mangano said. “Can I eat the tomatoes I grow in my yard?”

So far, the answer’s been yes. Which is why the fight against the plume continues.