

Well Testing Expanded Near East Hampton Airport

By [Joanne Pilgrim](#) | **October 17, 2017** - 10:06pm

Cowhill Lane in Wainscott is part of an area in which tests of home drinking water wells have been recommended to check for traces of a potentially harmful industrial chemical *David E. Rattray*

Private well testing by state and county health officials will be expanded in an area surrounding East Hampton Airport, where perfluorinated chemicals, or PFCs, that have been tied to a variety of health issues were found in drinking water at one residence as of last week. The free water testing will be offered to three times more properties than had been targeted at first.



Thirty-one residents of the area contacted East Hampton Town Hall after an announcement last week. The town is providing them with deliveries of bottled water, Supervisor Larry Cantwell said Tuesday. **The testing zone stretches from the airport on the north to Town Line and Daniel's Hole Road on the west and east, and dips just south of Montauk Highway at its other edge.** Anyone within the zone who drinks from a private well may request bottled water, regardless of whether their water has yet been tested.

The water quality examination stems from pollution incidents in other areas of Long Island -- including in Westhampton Beach near the Air National Guard base at Gabreski Airport, and in Yaphank near a county fire training facility -- which were linked to the use of firefighting foam. The foam contains two PFC compounds -- perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) -- which were found in drinking water and are considered harmful to human health. A survey of sites where firefighting foam had been used led health officials to the East Hampton Airport. The chemicals are also used in the aerospace, automotive, construction, and electronic industries.

An initial letter from the Suffolk County Health Department offering free testing of well water to residents within the zone of concern did not mention possible contamination. After receiving a limited response to that letter, the Health Department has sent out a second missive informing residents of the potential for chemical contamination and again offering free water tests.

"People are anxious to determine what may or may not have happened here," Mr. Cantwell said at a town board meeting on Tuesday. "The first step is to get the tests done as soon as possible," he said, so that property owners will know if their water is safe to drink.

In addition to sending letters, the county has sent people to knock on doors in the area, Mr. Cantwell said. "But I think they need to move more quickly."

There are almost 400 properties within the boundaries of the area of concern in Wainscott, which was delineated based on groundwater flow, the supervisor said Tuesday.

While the Health Department had initially planned to test 91 wells within the zone, he said he had pressed county officials during a phone call early this week to expand the number of wells to be tested. Approximately 269 will now be eligible. The supervisor said he had urged the Health Department "to move more expeditiously."

Information has been compiled regarding how many properties within the testing area actually rely on private wells, or are hooked up to public water mains. "A large percentage of people are not on public water," Mr. Cantwell said.

Water test results will provide "a better idea of the extent of the problem," he said, and allow officials to evaluate how to move forward. The extension of public water mains in the area, to get people off their private wells, could be discussed.

The Suffolk County Water Authority, which provides the "public" water to those hooked up to its mains, has not detected any PFCs in its East Hampton water supplies, several of the authority's water testing lab supervisors said on Tuesday. The authority has no wells south of the airport; the closest is on Town Line Road. "We don't have any contamination," the laboratory heads said. Water testing is normally done biannually.

Perfluorinated chemicals are "very persistent" in groundwater, the water experts said, and do not dissipate on their own. However, treating water with a system using granulated activated carbon is successful at removing them.

The final piece of the puzzle, after insuring that residents have water that is safe to drink, will be examining information as to possible sources of the perfluorinated chemicals, Mr. Cantwell said.

East Hampton Town established a firefighters' training facility on land adjacent to the airport, which is rented to the regional Fire Training Association. Six South Fork fire districts offer training for their volunteers there, and the facility is run by a board with representatives from all six districts.

However, "there is no burning going on at that facility," and no use of firefighting foam, said Dan Shields, a member of the Amagansett Fire Department and the chairman of the fire training board. "Most of our training takes place indoors," Mr. Shields said yesterday. Inside the building is a facsimile of a house interior, where volunteer firefighters practice rescues, making their way through smoke, and similar exercises. Outdoors, said Mr. Shields, they practice extricating accident victims from cars. There is "no foam, no water, no anything going on," he said by phone on Tuesday afternoon.

It is unclear whether the foam has ever been used to fight actual fires at the airport or in the area. Aside from one training exercise near a runway about a decade ago, when it might have been used, "they've never used it on an aircraft fire here that I know of," Jim Brundige, the airport manager, said Tuesday. "My office doesn't use or store any chemicals here," Mr. Brundige said.

Residents of Yaphank this week filed a class action lawsuit against five manufacturers of firefighting foams that contain the chemicals PFOS and PFOA, alleging that, through exposure to them in groundwater, they are now at increased risk of health effects, including on the liver and immune systems, and kidney and other cancers. Westhampton Beach residents have sued the county and state. Both the county Firematics Training Facility and the Gabreski Airport location have been declared Superfund Sites.

Last month, it was announced that PFCs were detected in two Hampton Bays Water District public supply wells that are no longer in use. The water district has proposed to install carbon filtration systems at all 11 of its wells, and New York State Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo recently announced an estimated \$720,000 state grant toward the \$1.2 million project.

About the Author

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