

OPINION / EDITORIAL

Plume needs BNL treatment



Brookhaven Science Associates environmental engineer Vinnie Racaniello at the North St. groundwater treatment system in Manorville on Mar 13, 2020. Credit: Jeffrey Basinger

By The Editorial Board

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Call it a tale of two plumes, a lesson in science, or a parable of corporate intransigence. Whatever the headline, the picture now is clear. The approach taken by Northrop Grumman and the U.S. Navy to containing the Grumman plume has been a failure. The proof lies just 35 miles to the east at Brookhaven National Lab, where a similar plume with similar chemicals posing similar threats to Long Island's aquifer is shrinking, not expanding.

A Newsday report by Paul LaRocco and David M. Schwartz makes clear in words and graphics that the "pump-and-treat" method used for more than 20 years at BNL has succeeded with that plume expected to be eradicated by 2070. But Northrop Grumman and the Navy — whose Bethpage plume was named a state Superfund site in 1983, six years before BNL's designation — continue to resist a \$585 million state plan to use a pump-and-treat system of 24 wells to remove toxic water from the aquifer, clean it, and return it to the ground.

The obstinance is wrongheaded, and baffling. Pump-and-treat has a long history of success. Remediation preferred by Grumman and the Navy has not stopped the disturbing one-foot-a-day spread of the plume toward the Great South Bay. It's time they dropped their opposition to the kind of pump-and-treat plan the Bethpage Water District called for in 1990. The state says it will do the work and bill Grumman and the Navy later, and it should, but it would be far better if Grumman and the Navy joined the fight now.

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