

Thursday, April 26, 2007

Four cited by EPA

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Four people with ties to Dutchess and Ulster counties were cited today by the Environmental Protection Agency for "outstanding efforts to protect the environment in New York."

Debra Hall of Hopewell Junction, from the organization Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water, was honored by the EPA for her work on behalf of indoor air standards and well testing.

Hall, who lives above a contaminated plume at the Hopewell Precision Superfund site and is conservation chair of the Mid-Hudson Sierra Club, played a key role in getting the EPA to place the site on the National Priorities List of the most hazardous waste sites, according to an announcement released today by the EPA.

Rich Schiafo is environmental project manager of Scenic Hudson, the Poughkeepsie-based organization with 10,000 members founded in 1963. Schiafo is also chair of Friends of the Hudson, an organization that promotes awareness of health, environmental protection and environmental justice issues related to PCB pollution of the Hudson River.

In the announcement of his award, Schiafo was cited for his work with local, state and federal officials, to make sure the cleanup of the Hudson included a wide range of strategies and up-to-date technology.

Steve and Julie Noble, environmental educators with the City of Kingston Parks and Recreation Department's Forsyth Nature Center, were cited for their work on a wide range of programs that promote awareness of Kingston's natural environment, including nature walks, kayaking trips, bird watching, composting, trail cleanups and tree planting.

The awards were presented by EPA Regional Administrator Alan J. Steinberg, at the federal agency's Manhattan offices.

Monday, April 23, 2007

Woman wins award for fight against pollution

By Lindsey Siegriest

For Focus

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

HOPEWELL JUNCTION - When the federal Environmental Protection Agency named Hopewell Junction resident Debra Hall for its top award, it was in recognition of her four years of work to protect the environmental quality of her community.

"I'm very excited and it's nice to be recognized," said Hall, who will receive the 2007 Environmental Award for individual work at a ceremony in Manhattan on Thursday.

The award is the highest recognition presented to the public by the EPA. Hall is being honored for her work with the Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water and Clean Air.

Four years ago, residents of Hopewell Junction received news that changed their lives and forced them to take action.

On Feb. 24, 2003, the Environmental Protection Agency sampled 75 residential wells in Hopewell Junction and found five were contaminated with tri-chloroethylene, a volatile organic compound often used as an industrial degreasing solvent.

Approximately 120 homes in the area have been found to have some sort of contamination from that compound as well as from trichloroethane or methyl ethyl ketone, both toxic solvents.

Hall had been living in her home in Hopewell Junction for two years when she got a flyer from the EPA.

Community members whose water was found to be contaminated were told not to drink, cook or wash vegetables with that water. They were also told not to take showers longer than two minutes, and only showered with cool water and had a window open or fan operating.

In 1979, a resident wrote to the EPA and complained about the practices at Hopewell Precision, Inc. a metal manufacturing company in Hopewell Junction. In 2004, Hopewell Precision was named as a potentially responsible party for the contamination.

Bill Borell had been living in his home in Hopewell Junction for 20 years before the EPA informed him and his wife their well had been contaminated.

"Finding out we had been exposed for over 20 years definitely caused us to lose sleep," Borell said.

He started to research and gather information about trichloroethane. He met Hall, and they got together with other members of the community to form the Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water and Clean Air.

The group has worked with local officials in Dutchess County, legislators, senators, EPA officials and Rep. Sue Kelly to get Hopewell Precision on the National Priorities List, to lower the trichloroethane vapor intrusion guidelines and to get the Hopewell Precision site officially named a Superfund site.

Reach Lindsey Siegriest at newsroom@poughkeepsiejournal.com

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Sunday, April 15, 2007

Environmental Web site to debut

Hearst Magazines on Friday announced the Earth Day launch of the The Daily Green, a consumer Web site dedicated to earth-friendly living at www.thedailygreen.com. Former Poughkeepsie Journal Environment Editor Dan Shapley, a Port Ewen resident, is the site's news editor.

Developed by media industry executive Deborah Jones Barrow of Rhinebeck and Hearst Magazines Digital Media group, The Daily Green will be a one-stop Web destination where green consumers can find each other and learn what they need to know to embrace an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Launching as a Beta version on April 22, The Daily Green will feature daily eco-tips; the day's key national and international environmental news; advice on smart energy

and product choices; recipes for meals and school lunches that are more hormone- and pesticide-free and ideas for creating a more toxin-free home.

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Friday, April 6, 2007

Meeting keys on pollution Hopewell site to be tested for health effects

By Sarah Bradshaw
Poughkeepsie Journal

HOPEWELL JUNCTION -Half a dozen Hopewell Junction residents attended a meeting Thursday regarding a Department of Health study that will determine if they live in areas with elevated incidences of cancer and/or birth defects.

Department of Health representatives hoped to get public input on two key issues regarding the upcoming health statistical review of the Hopewell Precision contaminated area - the time frame of the study and options for the study's geographical boundaries.

Research scientist James Bowers asked if the health department should hold off on performing the review until the Environmental Protection Agency has finished determining the scope of the area affected by waste generated from the cabinet manufacturer.

Because the testing by the environmental agency is on-going, no one is sure when the final results will be released, he said. The overall consensus from the participants was the study can't wait for the agency to finish defining the contamination's edges.

"We need to do it now," citizen Debra Hall said. "People are moving."

Bowers presented a map of the known areas of contamination. Using small census blocks, he was able to define a possible statistical area that encompassed all but 10 to 15 households affected by contamination. To include them would mean to include up to hundreds of other households not directly located in the affected area, and could also dilute the study's findings, he warned.

Data regarding cancer and birth defects from people living in specific census blocks will be compared to data from the state to determine if there are elevated incidences.

Resident Kurt Muller was a little skeptical. He wanted to know why the department

couldn't pinpoint specific areas.

Bowers said it would take many years to break down the residences by Zip code whereas this review should take about two years once the public discussion phase is completed. That won't happen until another public session is held. That meeting hasn't been announced.

Reach Sarah Bradshaw at sbradshaw@poughkeepsiejournal.com or 845-437-4811.

Resources

Residents can contact Bowers at 1-518-402-7990 or jab25@health.state.ny.us

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Chemicals killed man, suit alleges East Fishkill cancer case tied to pollution

The family of an East Fishkill man who died of cancer in 2004 has filed a lawsuit against Hopewell Precision, Inc., claiming chemicals from the cabinet-making firm caused his illness by contaminating groundwater in the neighborhood.

The suit, filed last week by Poughkeepsie attorney Frederick Bittner Jr. on behalf of the family of Frederick Koerber, seeks \$950,000 in damages.

In documents filed March 19, Bittner contends Koerber died of kidney cancer exactly three years earlier due to "pollution of groundwater with hazardous materials ... in and around the Hopewell Precision site."

Contacted Wednesday, Hopewell Precision President Richard Skeen said he was not aware of the lawsuit and could not comment further.

Federal environmental authorities have designated some of the land around the Hopewell Precision property as a Superfund site known to have become contaminated as the result of chemical spills.

According to preliminary studies by state and federal authorities, some residents of the neighborhood could face an increased risk of cancer and other diseases. But the chance of developing cancer was deemed

low, meaning one additional cancer case could be expected for every 10,000 to 1 million people exposed to these levels of chemicals.

No risk seen

The report, prepared by the state Health Department and the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, dismissed potential cumulative risks of exposure to the multiple chemicals found in both air and water as "unlikely."

Results of a further study by the state Health Department analyzing cancer rates, birth defects and other data from those who live in the neighborhood, are expected to be released next year.

- Larry Hertz

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Friday, March 16, 2007

Where county fails, towns can deliver

Dutchess County officials should be thoroughly embarrassed that some towns are thinking about moving forward to do a job the county should be doing itself.

In particular, Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Caldwell should be outright ashamed.

It's bad enough Dutchess County Executive William Steinhaus and a group of legislators don't see the need to listen to the sound advice of the county Board of Health and implement a strong well-testing law. But Caldwell, too, has resisted this idea, concerned about the impact it would have on his department. That's understandable, to a point. Nevertheless, as health commissioner, Caldwell should be supporting the law in concept while pushing lawmakers to ensure the program is adequately funded.

Inevitably, the need for better well testing will become more apparent as the county grows. The county, in fact, should serve as one of the models for the state to get behind better means of protecting water sources. Instead, some towns may have to lead.

This week, Dutchess lawmakers failed to override Steinhaus' veto of the well-testing law. The 12 Democrats in the 25-member Legislature supported the measure, as did Republican legislator Marge Horton. But it wasn't enough to override the veto. This negates the push by the supporting legislators and the Board of Health to mandate that wells be tested when homes are sold in Dutchess. The law would have forced landlords to test periodically the places they are renting.

Rockland County has a similar law on the books; so does New Jersey. Leaders there recognize certain facts and trends: that chemical pollution sometimes seeps into wells, spreads and can go undetected for years, even decades, until it becomes one big, expensive problem to clean up. Dutchess is now home to several federal Superfund sites as a result of this scenario.

Keep in mind Dutchess has between 30,000 and 40,000 private wells, and even limited testing by the county Health Department has turned up a variety of contaminants - not only in highly publicized places in southern Dutchess but throughout the county.

The well-testing law wouldn't have been a total solution to water pollution, but it would have helped immensely. Aside from informing people involved in real estate transactions and protecting renters, it would have given the county more data to track trends about where "hot spots" of pollution may be. Current tests check for bacteria but not the types of contaminants generally associated with industrial use.

Supervisors weighing town-level regulations

In anticipation of the county's utter failure here, several supervisors said they would explore initiating the well-testing law on the town level. They are Joan Pagonos of Fishkill, John Hickman of East Fishkill and Joseph Ruggiero of Wappinger. If the towns do move forward as expected, the county Health Department must get involved. Most likely, the municipal laws would be regulated through the towns' respective building departments. People buying and selling homes would, at least, be made aware if certain contaminants exist in wells, and would have to agree on remedies before the sale, such as installing water filters. A comprehensive water test through a state-certified lab can cost between \$150 and \$500, depending on a number of factors. That's a small price to pay to ensure you are drinking safe water.

But the town laws would be most effective if county health experts use the information to track trends and help with long-term strategies. Steinhaus himself has spent considerable time during his administration talking about the need for willing partnerships between the county and towns, especially when it comes to protection of natural resources and planning in general.

It is disgraceful the towns will have to pick up the slack here. The county should be leading the way. At minimum, it must participate actively in helping the towns carry out their water-testing laws in the most meaningful way. It is, indeed, the very least the county can do after falling short on a critical matter, one that won't go away simply because short-sighted lawmakers and the executive rejected one good remedy.

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Wednesday, March 7, 2007

Valley Views: Well tests would provide data, protect our families

Water is the essence of life. The water you drink, cook in and bathe in, if contaminated, can cause you irreparable harm. Your family, too, especially children and the unborn, according to the National Academy of Sciences, will suffer harm from polluted water.

Residents all over Dutchess County have been suffering the consequences of water contaminated from cancer-causing solvents and additives that do not biodegrade and sometimes actually vaporize and contaminate household air.

Contamination of well water can occur anywhere, not only in known Superfund sites or in targeted areas. Testing wells at closing of sale would provide critical data from a cross-section of the private wells in the county, giving homeowners, neighbors and the Department of Health early knowledge of potential problems with water quality.

In one semi-rural part of the county, a neighbor had buried an outboard motor in his yard before he moved out of the state. MTBE from gasoline in the motor seeped into the aquifer, contaminating six neighboring wells. This in an area far from industry, farm run-off or gasoline stations.

Because water moves underground, any household getting its water from a private well is potentially at risk of contamination. All town, city and community wells, as well as schools and shopping centers that serve large numbers of citizens, are tested regularly. Private residential wells serving approximately 60 percent of Dutchess households are not regularly tested, although tests of wells for new developments are mandated. Certainly, private wells are no less important to their owners than those wells now being tested. We all need clean water.

Question of costs arises

But who is to pay for protecting the safety of private well water? And is there any point to knowing your well is already polluted? Certainly, anyone who owns a home can choose to test at any time, and we encourage periodic testing. However, when a house is being sold, presumably at a profit, that is the logical point at which to extend the common practice of testing for E. coli and bacteria to require tests for carcinogens, nitrates, chlorides and other substances recommended by the Department of Health.

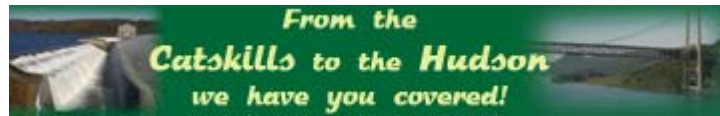
Based on experiences in New Jersey and Rockland County, these tests typically cost between \$300 and \$500 at certified labs - not an exorbitant cost considering the value of a home and the peace of mind knowing the water is not going to cause illness. There are two New York state-certified water testing laboratories in our area.

If contamination is found, remediation is available and can be negotiated between buyer and seller, and federal and state laws give power to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Conservation to hold sources of pollution responsible.

In the interests of public health and the economic well-being of Dutchess, we support the well-testing law recommended

by our Board of Health and urge our colleagues in the Legislature to join us.

Sandy Goldberg, R-Wappinger, is assistant minority leader of the Dutchess County Legislature. Marge Horton, R-East Fishkill, and Bill McCabe, D-Union Vale, are county legislators.



Thursday, March
1, 2007

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Fishkill to mandate well testing, says town supervisor

Fishkill – The Town of Fishkill is one success story after another, Supervisor Joan Pagonos told a packed house at her annual state of the town address Wednesday night.

Those successes include ensuring residents are safe, and to that end, Pagonos said the town board will vote to adopt a local well-testing law, requiring that homeowners test their private wells when they are selling their homes.

“I think that we have a responsibility when we sell a home to some unsuspecting soul that they are going to have clean water and they know they are,” she said.

The neighboring Town of East Fishkill, with two superfund sites, plans on adopting similar legislation.

The actions come after the Dutchess County Legislature adopted a well testing law, but County Executive William Steinhaus vetoed it.

In her annual address, Pagonos also spoke of finalizing plans to secure 93 acres of parks and open space on the former Texaco property in Glenham and of ongoing plans to develop a Veterans Memorial Park and a War Dog Memorial Park.



Pagonos

SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

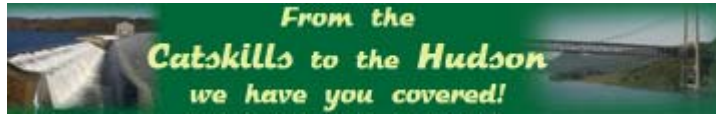
The NYS Department of Health sent letters to all homes above the contaminated plume. The letter concerns the start of our Health Statistics Review. The DOH is asking for our input. Our ideas are very important for this to be a successful report. Please elect to attend this important meeting. For those of you that did not get a letter for whatever reason, here is a copy of it.

[HSRinviteletter.pdf](#)

If you want to attend this special input meeting please send your name and address to:

NYS DOH

**Attn.: VOC Registry Center/Rm. 200
547 River Street
Troy, NY 12180-9986**



**Weekend,
February 24-25,
2007**

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Town may adopt its own well testing law

East Fishkill – Dutchess County may not have a well testing law now that County Executive William Steinhaus vetoed it, but the Town of East Fishkill will explore adopting its own.

That town is one of the contaminated water hotspots in the county and Supervisor John Hickman said the town board will explore setting up its own local law, but first it must explore the possibilities.

“Where in the sale process this could happen? What would we need to do type of legislation? What would we be testing for?” he said. Hickman said there would be public hearings where he would expect “a lot of good ideas would come up and we would act on them too.”

The county’s law would have required that any residence with a private well that was being sold would first have to undergo a water quality test. Steinhaus said the county has no right to impose that on people; that it’s their option if they want it.

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Friday, February 23, 2007

Editorial: It's up to you, 12 lawmakers

Dutchess County Executive William Steinhaus' decision to veto a well-testing law ignores the recommendations of health experts and goes against the very sound long-term planning principles he claims to espouse.

This is a great setback for the county.

The county Legislature should vote to override the veto at once. And the Board of Health, which voted in favor of well testing, should explore any legal options it may have to force lawmakers to comply. The county needs a much better system for identifying pollution that has seeped into water wells in various ways, through outlandish practices of companies over the decades and through people's irresponsible behavior. Dozens of private wells throughout the county had been

found to be contaminated - when tests have been done on them. Trouble is, there is no requirement for private wells to be tested, so these matters can go unchecked indefinitely.

The Board of Health has proposed a sound, though not perfect, solution. It wants broader well tests when homes are sold in Dutchess - and it wants landlords to be required to test periodically the places they are renting. These ideas are modeled off effective systems in Rockland County and New Jersey.

In his veto statement, Steinhaus said he didn't believe the overwhelming majority of residents want elected representatives "to be dictators of private personal behaviors, intruding in private lives, and certainly not on their private personal property or in their homes."

It's hard to disagree with that statement. But groundwater doesn't stay in one place; it moves and, thus, it can become a legitimate and substantial public health issue. People should know what they are drinking, and the county could use the information to map out exactly where the hot spots of contamination are - and to better plan for the county's growth.

Pollution is not limited

Current tests check for bacteria but not the types of contaminants generally associated with industrial use. As a result, homeowners in the Shenandoah and Hopewell Precision areas of East Fishkill and the Greenbush area of Hyde Park have found their wells were contaminated when chemical spills or gasoline leaks went undetected for long periods of time. These residents now have to rely on water filters or costly public water systems, which all taxpayers help fund. And taxpayers also are paying for the multimillion-dollar environmental cleanups of these spills when the culprits can't be identified.

These are not isolated incidents.

For example, health officials have found contamination from MTBE, a gasoline additive, throughout the county, often in businesses near gas stations. While using MTBE in gasoline has now been banned in New York, the fact it spread so rapidly shows how pollution doesn't stay in contained places. And the longer it takes officials to discover a spill, the more the public's health will be in jeopardy and the less likely it will be that the polluter will be caught.

Last year, the Board of Health amended the sanitary code to authorize the new well-testing requirements that would help get at these problems. There are many variables, but a comprehensive water test through a state-certified lab can cost between \$150 and \$500. The buyer and seller can negotiate the deal as part of the home sale. But the county attorney issued an opinion saying the board did not have authority to carry out the mandate. This year, county legislators took up the measure, approving it by the slimmest of margins, 13-12. The Legislature needs 17 votes to override a Steinhaus veto. That means four lawmakers must break ranks.

The 12 lawmakers who should get the opportunity to do that are: Patrick Nesbitt, Suzanne Horn, Robert Sears, Noreen Reilly, Robert Rolison, Mary Swartz, Shannon Martin LaFrance, Gary Cooper, David Seymour, Gerald Hutchings, David Kelly and Timothy Basting. In voting against the law originally, some of them were clearly following the lead of LaFrance, who believes the county should carry out a targeted but voluntary testing program instead. But the county Board of Health says this alternative isn't good enough. These 12 lawmakers must think carefully about the long-term consequences of their decision. All of them owe it to the public to study this issue with the great care it deserves. Over time, more pollution will be found in Dutchess; other spills will occur. A stronger well-testing law won't solve all these problems, but it is one tangible solution, on the table, awaiting action.

These dissenting lawmakers should listen to what the county's own health experts are saying. To do otherwise is unconscionable.

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

Friday, February 23, 2007

Valley Views: Water-testing measure is critical for health

By Debra Hall

Dutchess County needs to have this mandatory well-testing law for many reasons. The first reason that comes to mind is health. Contaminated water causes cancers, skin problems, liver and kidney disease and auto-immune issues. The contamination especially affects pregnant women, children and the elderly.

Laboratories will share the test results with the county. The county will be able to post the results on the G.I.S. system. Residents living near a home which was found to have an issue will be notified. Currently, residents can live next door to a home with MTBE (methyl tertiary butyl ether) contamination and never get notified.

When homes are sold, many sellers elect to use the New York State Disclosure law to their benefit by simply paying \$500, which protects them from any wrongdoing. The Dutchess County Private Well Testing Law will make sure buyers are told the truth about their water.

Had this type of law been in effect, the residents living in the Hopewell Precision Superfund Site would have been alerted a few years after the pollutants dripped into the aquifer, not a few decades. Although the [state Department of Environmental Conservation] had done an investigation, their investigation was science-based and did not find anything substantial. It was only until the EPA tested wells near Hopewell Precision in 2003 that they found homes with amounts of TCE as high as 50 times the standard. The EPA simply tested, not using science, but common sense.

10% of wells contaminated

An article in the Poughkeepsie Journal on Feb. 24, 2002, said according to Dutchess County's chief public health engineer, John Glass, about 10 percent of Dutchess County's public wells were found to have chemical contamination. He also said, "We've found it in places you wouldn't expect. ... We've found it in places that aren't anywhere near gas stations." This is proof contamination can be anywhere. Also, 10 percent is a very large number, considering we all get our water from the same place.

We need water to live and therefore it is our most precious resource. Locating and mitigating contaminated water is a matter of life. I see it as a no-brainer.

Debra Hall of Hopewell Junction Citizens for Clean Water: www.Hopewell-Junction-Citizens-for-Clean-Water.org

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

State will investigate cancer and birth defects at polluted site

By Dan Shapley

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

HOPEWELL JUNCTION —Residents living in the Hopewell Precision Superfund site will know within about a year whether or not their East Fishkill neighborhood has elevated incidences of cancer or birth defects.

The state Department of Health will analyze its databases of cancer cases and birth outcomes to see if rates of illness in the neighborhood differ from rates statewide.

“We’ll be doing a comparison for all cancers. We’ll also be determining whether there’s a prevalence of birth defects,” health department spokeswoman Claire Pospisil said.

The study will go beyond the predictions in a draft health assessment released in November. That report stated that some of the 670 residents in the area may face a slightly elevated risk of developing cancer because of exposure to toxic chemical solvents in well water and indoor air. Its results were based on chemical concentrations, duration and pathway of exposure, and toxicity studies.

Some want more details

Some residents have called for the more detailed “health statistics review” because they suspect chemicals have caused health problems, because a similar review found elevated disease rates in a similar neighborhood, and because more information can help them seek better medical care.

“As a community, if we find that there’s a higher amount of testicular cancer, say, then teenagers on up should start to get tested and checked for testicular cancer, instead of waiting for the average age,” said Debra Hall, a resident who has become a nationally recognized advocate on polluted site issues.

Dozens of polluted wells were discovered in 2003, decades after Hopewell Precision Inc., a cabinet manufacturer on Ryan Drive, was alleged to have dumped solvents. Trichloroethylene, or TCE, is the most prominent of at least three solvents polluting groundwater there.

TCE has been the subject of a controversy since 2001, when the EPA published a draft health risk assessment — based on a spate of new scientific findings — stating the chemical was far more toxic than previously believed. After protests by industry groups and other federal departments responsible for cleaning polluted sites, and scrutiny by the National Academy of Science, the EPA is revising its assessment.

The health department’s November report about the Hopewell Precision site did not include references to the EPA’s 2001 report. That prompted criticism from some residents, who questioned whether it considered the most recent scientific findings.

The new analysis in East Fishkill will begin shortly when the health department meets with residents to define the study area, Pospisil said. The study will take about a year.

A similar study was completed last year in Endicott, Broome County. It found that elevated incidence of testicular cancer, kidney cancer and birth problems like heart defects were not likely due to chance.

Researchers in Endicott have yet to determine whether they have enough data to study whether the chemical exposure contributed to those disease rates. A report on that topic is expected next month.

Dan Shapley can be reached at dshapley@poughkeepsiejournal.com

Read the health assessment

The Department of Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry will continue to take public comment on the document until February 23, 2007.

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

Well-testing bill approved

By David Paulsen

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com

A Dutchess County well-testing law is on its way to County Executive William Steinhaus' desk for him to sign or veto following passage Monday night by the county Legislature.

The law passed with the support of all 12 Democratic legislators and Republican Marge Horton of East Fishkill, but those 13 votes are four short of the number that would be needed to override a veto. Steinhaus has yet to say publicly whether he intends to veto the law. He has 30 days to decide.

The vote Monday night came after 50 minutes of discussion by legislators and after several residents had spoken earlier in the meeting in favor of the law.

"We all need water to survive," Beacon resident Flora Jones said. "And for the life of me, I can't understand why this is such a difficult issue."

The law would require anyone selling a home with a private well to pay to test it for contamination before closing on the sale. The tests would cost about \$500, according to a commonly cited estimate, though officials have yet to calculate precise figures.

The law also would affect residential landlords and the owners of commercial properties who use drinking water from untested private wells, which would have to be tested within a year.

Data from the tests would be compiled by the county Department of Health and could be used to identify unknown cases of contamination and alert nearby residents.

Local Democrats, as well as residents in Hopewell Junction and other communities hit by contamination, have hailed the law as a nonpartisan step toward addressing water quality issues. But Republican leaders, including Steinhaus, have suggested other approaches would be more feasible and effective.

"I don't see this bill as being the answer," Majority Leader Noreen Reilly, R-Hyde Park, said before voting against the law mandating well testing.

Republican legislators introduced an alternative resolution last year that called for the county to pay for targeted well tests starting in neighborhoods at greater risk of groundwater contamination, but that measure has failed to win the support of a majority of legislators

David Paulsen can be reached at dpaulsen@poughkeepsiejournal.com

www.PoughkeepsieJournal.com Editorial

Friday, January 19, 2007

Spill illustrates danger to wells

As Dutchess County launched another round of what seems like interminable talks about water

protection, a massive oil spill occurred in the Town of Dover, leaving many residents there fearing for the safety of their wells.

Talk about a teachable moment. This is yet another example why safeguarding underground water sources must be a priority. Putting better well-testing regulations on the books is one way to achieve this.

Authorities are working to clean up the heating oil that spilled onto the street, adjacent lawns and into nearby wetlands after a truck driver lost control of the vehicle while attempting to avoid a deer. Since the spill occurred near the Great Swamp, one of the largest freshwater wetlands in New York state, they also will need to vigorously check the health of that water body, part of an integral system that provides drinking water for people in Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties — and beyond.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation is assessing the damage and already has inspected four wells that serve homes, though some neighbors say the department's spill team was slow to arrive.

The public, and the residents there, at least now know about the spill, and authorities must be committed to dealing with it thoroughly. But, over the decades, officials and residents have come to discover many other spills that weren't reported. Two neighborhoods in East Fishkill have been declared federal Superfund cleanup sites as a result. A series of gasoline spills caused similar problems to a neighborhood in Hyde Park. Taxpayers will shell out millions of dollars to clean up these sites and help provide alternative means of clean water to these neighborhoods.

Dutchess officials are considering some measures that would help identify these potential hazards sooner rather than later.

These matters have been discussed long enough. In fact, after waiting for years for lawmakers to do something, the county Board of Health did do something: It boldly amended the sanitary code to mandate broader well tests when homes are sold. Landlords also would have to have wells inspected every six years to better protect their tenants from contaminated water. There was good reason for these changes: Current tests check for bacteria but not the types of contaminants generally associated with industrial use.

Law would help provide needed information

While there are a number of variables, a comprehensive water test through a state-certified lab can cost between \$150 and \$500. In cases where homes are being sold, the buyer and seller can negotiate the deal. A stronger well testing law would not solve all the problems, of course. But it would enable the county Health Department to compile the results, using the data to get a much better understanding of where underground pollution exists and warning nearby residents if need be.

While the Board of Health was on the right track, the county attorney issued an opinion saying it did not have authority to carry out the mandate. And neither County Executive William Steinhaus nor Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Caldwell believes the board's solution is a health priority.

Steinhaus suggested this week that towns could start their own comprehensive well testing program if they saw fit. That would prove unwieldy, and the smaller towns in particular wouldn't have the resources to start such a program. Moreover, spills can easily seep across town lines. The county needs a comprehensive solution.

Steinhaus also called attention to another alternative available to lawmakers — a targeted testing

effort funded by the county budget, as opposed to a countywide initiative. While legislators should consider that proposal, they also should keep in mind that the county's Board of Health — the appointed experts — believe the more sweeping well-testing law is the way to go.

How, in good conscience, can the lawmakers ignore the views of these experts? The legislators should ponder at least one other thing today: The Dover spill was discovered. How many others have not been?

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Hearings to continue on well law Hyde Park, Millbrook are next locations

By David Paulsen
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Dutchess County residents will have two more chances to comment on a proposed county well-testing law at public hearings next week in Millbrook and Hyde Park.

The sessions, Tuesday in Millbrook and Wednesday in Hyde Park, follow similar sessions held last month in East Fishkill and Poughkeepsie.

The proposed law would require anyone selling a home with a private well to pay to test the well for contamination before closing on the sale. The measure also would affect residential landlords and the owners of commercial properties who use drinking water from private wells, which would have to be tested within a year.

Support of Democrats

The proposal has the support of Democrats in the county Legislature and at least one Republican, Marge Horton of East Fishkill, where water contamination has been a hot issue.

Majority Leader Noreen Reilly, R-Hyde Park, said Republican leaders plan to delay a vote at least until February to allow time for legislators to review resident comments made at the public hearings.

"We want to make sure we take everyone's comments into consideration before voting," Reilly said.

Supporters of the proposal had hoped for a vote at the Legislature's Jan. 22 meeting.

"There's really no reason why it shouldn't come up in January. The hearings were planned to end prior to the meeting," Minority Leader Roger Higgins, D-New Hamburg, said. "It appears to me just another effort to stall it."

Both sides agree water quality is an issue that should be addressed by the county, but they have differed on what approach to take.

Last year, Republicans proposed setting aside county money for targeted well tests in neighborhoods with a high risk of contamination, but that measure didn't have enough votes to pass.

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