

SEWAGE BILL SIGNED

■ **Suffolk would ban** new cesspool installations

■ **Also track** failing systems and require septic permits

BY RICK BRAND
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Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone Thursday signed landmark legislation to ban the installation of new cesspools, require permits for new septic systems and track failures of aging wastewater systems countywide.

Bellone signed the measure surrounded by county lawmakers and environmental, civic and business leaders near the shore of Lake Ronkonkoma,

once a bustling resort area, which now suffers from pollution problems.

"We're making a gigantic leap forward today," said Bellone. "This marks a historic step in our fight to reclaim our water. This fight belongs to all of us . . . If we do not reverse the decades of decline, we will not have a prosperous future."

The new law closes a loophole in a 1973 law that banned cesspools in new construction and instead required septic systems. However, the measure never required homeowners to add a septic tank when they replaced existing cesspools that failed.

The new law will require the industry to begin tracking failures of septic and cesspool

systems starting July 1, 2018, and require residents to obtain permits when installing new septic systems. Adding a septic tank, officials say, will add \$2,000 to \$2,500 for each home in a county in which there are 360,000 unsewered homes. Of that total, 252,000 use only cesspools.

However, Legis. Rob Trotta (R-Fort Salonga) said the new measure "does nothing" to protect the groundwater. "This is all about requiring a permit for which the public will have to pay. It's all about the money," he said.

While county officials originally estimated there would be a \$70 permit fee, Deputy County Executive Peter Scully said that after lawmakers raised concerns, the state De-

partment of Environmental Conservation has agreed to provide \$360,000 in grants to avoid imposing a permit fee for the first 18 months.

Bellone maintained that closing the loophole will "set the stage for the evolution away from non-performing cesspools and septic systems and ultimately to use state of the art technology that will . . . reverse the decline in water quality" by as much as 70 percent.

However, new high-tech systems that reduce nitrogen from wastewater cost about \$17,000, more than twice that of septic systems. The county has implemented a grant and loan program, for which 228 homeowners so far have applied for aid and 160 have

been approved. The county has also applied for the state's \$75 million in additional grants and loans, but officials concede the funding will only cover a fraction of the 5,000 to 9,000 systems that officials expect could fail annually.

Several lawmakers and activists acknowledge the regulatory measure is just the first of many needed to make the initiative work.

"This is the first regulatory step," said Legis. Bridget Fleming (D-Sag Harbor). "We are going to continue to keep our shoulders to the wheel until every lake, every bay, every harbor and every creek in Suffolk County is pristine and teeming with life, which makes our economy and our way of life thrive."

Fire hits Oakdale storage

BY JOAN GRALLA
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A fire erupted in a two-story building at a self-storage facility Thursday afternoon in Oakdale, with the contents of six units burned or damaged by smoke and water, officials said.

Five fire departments responded to the blaze at Oakdale Self Storage and had it under control in about 90 minutes, said West Sayville Fire Chief Todd Gray.

"Everything went well," he said, noting no injuries were reported.

Police said the fire was reported at 2:55 p.m.

As many as 50 to 60 firefighters painstakingly sorted through the contents of the six units to ensure there were no hidden fires, Gray said.

"That's labor-intensive, especially as people put as much stuff as they can in some of the units," he said.

Flames caused "heavy damage" to whatever was stored



Several storage units and their contents were damaged by the blaze at Oakdale Self Storage on Montauk Highway in Oakdale on Thursday.

in four of the units, Gray said, and the contents of the other two were damaged by water and smoke.

In addition to clothing, construction equipment had been stored, Gray said, adding that Suffolk police will investigate what caused the fire.

The Town of Islip's building

inspectors will have to ensure the building is safe, Gray said, noting the concrete floor on the second floor suffered structural damage.

The fire's intense heat, followed by the "rapid cooling" of the water caused "spalling," or cracking, he said.

Paul Thompson, who owns

the storage facility at 1625 Montauk Hwy., saluted the firefighters for their work.

The storage units vary in size, and customers are allowed to store whatever they like, often summer or winter clothing — but nothing flammable, such as gasoline or propane, he said.

Firefighters were departing shortly before 6 p.m., he said later.

The blaze forced Suffolk police to close part of Montauk Highway temporarily. That route was reopened later, along with Exit 46A of east-bound Sunrise Highway, which also had been shut.