

News

Environment The Putnam Examiner

Putnam Valley Health Dept. to Address Water Contamination

📅 March 1, 2023 👤 Abby Luby 📍 Putnam Valley

📄 We are part of The Trust Project

Concerns about the safety of drinking water in Putnam Valley have prompted the **Putnam County Department of Health** (DOH) to address the issue at the next Town Board work session on Mar. 8 at 5 p.m.

“Residents have asked questions about water contaminants and well testing and I didn’t know the answer so I reached out to the DOH,” said Town Supervisor Jacqueline Annabi. “We’ve asked residents to submit questions at the (last board) meeting, and so far, we’ve received about 15 questions.”

The issue of contaminated drinking water was heightened in January when the Putnam Valley School District filed a lawsuit against more than 20 chemical companies for allegedly contaminating the elementary school’s drinking water and to recoup funds the district paid to install and monitor a new filtration system.

Subsequently similar contaminants, including perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), were found in the Floradan Estates’ residential drinking water, and by the end of January, the Putnam Valley Fire Department filed a show cause order against John Adorno, owner of Universal Construction of Yorktown, accusing him of dumping contaminated material in 2016 at what is now the construction site for the new firehouse on Oscawana Lake Road.

According to the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the fire department site is in an Aquifer Protection Zone. Under DEC oversight, a clean-up of the site was done in 2021 and included the removal of 83 tons of asbestos waste and 4,236 tons of contaminated soils.

Known as “forever chemicals,” PFAS are found in hundreds of industrial applications and consumer products and have been widely used in certain fire suppression foam. Once discharged the chemicals remain in the environment, bioaccumulate in the human body and have been linked to cancer, liver damage, immune system impairment, kidney and testicular cancer, high cholesterol, thyroid disease and ulcerative colitis.

“We’re going to present information about PFAS and this emerging issue,” said Chris Formisano, communications director for Putnam County who is working on the Mar. 8 presentation. “We are trying to educate the public on the threshold of the contaminants, when the levels are problematic and dangerous.”

In 2016, guidelines from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allowed the maximum contaminant levels (MCL) for PFAS at 70 parts per trillion (ppt). In July 2020, then-Gov. Cuomo introduced a first-in-the-nation testing standard for PFAS in New York’s drinking water, setting the allowable MCL at 10 ppt, among the lowest in the United States.

About 15 residents attended the last Putnam Valley Town Board meeting on Feb. 15, which became contentious when the fire department dumping issue was raised during public comment. Councilman Louie Luongo announced he would recuse himself from any discussion about the fire department contamination since he has been a longtime member of the department. His wife, Sheryl Luongo, is the fire company president, as well as the town assessor.

Commenting on the fire department legal action was town resident Patty Villanova.

“We just found out a little bit more about one of the biggest scandals in our town, namely the dumping that took place on the fire department property back in 2016 when someone from the Putnam Valley Fire Department allowed a private contractor to dump contaminated fill,” Villanova said.

Annabi interrupted Villanova and asked her if the word “scandal” was in any of the documents Villanova referred to.

“I’m really amazed that, in my opinion, such a big scandal didn’t even merit your comments at the beginning of the meeting,” Villanova shot back.

Coming to the fire department’s defense was Fire Department Vice Chair Bruce Johnson, reiterating the department was comprised of volunteers who live in town and are friends and neighbors who pay taxes.

“We would never, under any circumstances, purposely do anything that would cause harm to the environment, such as to our shared water supply,” Johnson said. “We have been accused as well as other state and local agencies of being part of a vast conspiracy and coverup and that we accepted money for allowing illegal and reprehensible dumping on our property. These accusations are outrageous, without merit, insulting and completely baseless.”

Villanova asked why the department waited seven years to take legal action against the contractor but no answer was given.

PFAS substances have long been known to appear in drinking water across New York State, including the Hudson Valley.

A letter to Annabi from the DOH confirming the Mar. 8 meeting date also stated that plans were being worked out to present PFAS-related information in a public forum for the entire county.

Questions for next week’s work session can be sent to

jannabi@putnamvalley.gov or by calling 845-526-3280. It will take place at Putnam Valley Town Hall, located at 265 Oscawana Lake Rd. in Putnam Valley.

Abby Luby

Abby is a local journalist who has reported on breaking news for more than 20 years. She currently covers community issues in The Examiner as a full-time reporter and has written for the paper since its inception in 2007. [Read more from Abby's editor-author bio here.](#) Read Abby's archived work here: <https://www.theexaminernews.com/author/ab-lub2019/>