



FIRST IN NEWSDAY

## JFK Woes Delay Trip To Sing For Pope

But LI students  
make it to Europe

A5



ST. ANTHONY'S HIGH SCHOOL / CHRISTINA BUEHLER

Members of the St. Anthony's High School  
chorus and band pose just before trip.

## Suffolk's Main Website Back Online

A4

VIDEO AT [NEWSDAY.TV](#)

# 'SIGNIFICANT' LEVELS OF TOXIC CHEMICALS

MacArthur Airport  
declared Superfund  
site due to soil,  
groundwater  
contamination

DEC chief says  
public water wells  
are safe

A2-3 | [VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV](#)



BARRY SLOAN

Air traffic control tower at Long Island MacArthur  
Airport in Ronkonkoma.

# FULL LIRR SERVICE FOR ELMONT-UBS STATION

A3

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## TOP STORIES

# DEC: MACARTHUR IS

## 'Significant' soil and groundwater contamination

### FIRST IN NEWSDAY

**BY BRIANNE LEDDA**  
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State environmental officials have designated Long Island MacArthur Airport in Ronkonkoma as a Superfund site after detecting "significant" chemical contamination in groundwater and soil.

The Department of Environmental Conservation on Friday confirmed it found perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, also known as PFAS, "at levels that exceed applicable standards," a spokesperson said Friday. The site was listed as a possible Superfund site in 2018 over concerns that past use and storage of perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS, a chemical found in firefighting foams used at airports, could have contaminated drinking water supplies.

The substances, also known as "forever chemicals" because they don't break down easily, have been linked to immune system problems, cancers and other health impacts, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

State DEC Executive Deputy Commissioner Sean Mahar, in a virtual news conference Friday afternoon, said there will be a "full investigation" at the airport, which "has site-related contaminants" that need to be cleaned up. "We have to declare it a significant threat because of what's there."

The listing of the Superfund site "is just a formality in this process," Mahar said. "That gives us more tools in the toolbox to hold the responsible parties accountable, ensure an appropriate investigation is undertaken, and the appropriate cleanup measures are advanced."

## Islip: 'no health concern'

"There isn't a concern right now for any public exposure to this," he said, adding that resi-



SOURCE: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

dents can safely use water from public wells.

MacArthur Airport is owned by the Town of Islip. A town spokesperson told Newsday in a statement that "there is no health concern," and public drinking water supplies, which are closely monitored, "continue to meet standards." The town declined to discuss potential plans for remediation.

The town is working with the state DEC and Suffolk County Water Authority "in an ongoing effort to address the impacts of PFOS and PFOA, which began in the 1970s with the military use of firefighting foam, and continued with airline use until 2000," the spokesperson said.

## WHAT TO KNOW

■ **Long Island MacArthur Airport** in Ronkonkoma has been designated as a state Superfund site after "significant" chemical contamination was detected there.

■ **A spokesperson for the Town of Islip**, which owns the airport, said "there is no health concern," and public drinking water supplies "continue to meet standards."

■ **The state DEC** is overseeing "a comprehensive investigation to define the full nature and extent of the contamination" and will "take appropriate action to address" the issue.

The DEC is negotiating an agreement with Islip to clean up the site and will continue to keep the community informed, Mahar said. Once the investigation is complete, a remedial action plan will be developed and put out for public comment.

Timothy J. Hopkins, chief legal officer for the Suffolk County Water Authority, in an statement, said: "All SCWA wells in the vicinity of MacArthur Airport have drinking water treatment systems installed that remove PFAS contaminants to non-detectable levels."

## 'Not surprising'

Suffolk County Water Authority chairman Patrick Halpin said Friday while "a Superfund site is never good news, frankly, it's not surprising, considering the industrial development that has occurred on Long Island over the decades."

Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said PFAS is an emerging contaminant "we now know more about . . . than we did even just 10 years ago."

"This actually is not surprising," she said. "Airports across the nation are struggling right now with a number of fuel spills. But also with fire training centers across Long Island and New York state, many of them are being declared Superfund sites because of the contamination in the foam . . . That foam now is being transitioned to foam that does not have the toxic chemical of



# A SUPERFUND SITE



Passengers arrive at the main terminal at Long Island MacArthur Airport in 2022. ■ Video: [newsday.tv](https://www.newsday.tv)

PFAS. Many of these training facilities are now turning in their old foam to the DEC for it to be properly disposed of.”

“The good news with this chemical is that we do have the technology to filter it,” she said.

PFAS chemicals, including those used in nonstick and stain-resistant materials and firefighting foam, have been found in hundreds of public and private wells on the Island since 2016. PFOS and PFOA are part of the classification of chemicals known as PFAS.

New York State in 2020 set drinking water standards for PFOS and PFOA, the most studied PFAS compounds, at 10 parts per trillion, though many water providers have asked for extensions to implement treatments. The amount of PFOS and PFOA permitted in drinking water is so low that it is the equivalent of 10 grains of sand in an Olympic-size swimming pool. In 2022, the EPA reduced its proposed guidelines for the two chemicals to levels that are lower than state standards and below current detection ability.

David Nadler, a New York Institute of Technology faculty member who has conducted research on ways to safely break down PFAS, said the chemical has been in use as far back as the mid-20th century and can be found in some common products such as water-resistant fabrics or stain-resistant carpet.

“It’s been there a long time. We just happen to realize it now,” he said. “Has it affected anyone? Well, that’s where we’re

lacking in long term studies.”

## Status concerns residents

A DEC spokesperson said 723 residents near the airport were mailed letters about the Superfund site status. Some told Newsday they’re concerned and have questions about what exactly the Superfund status means for their water supply.

Stephanie Poliey, 27, of Holbrook, said she’s not “too worried” yet, so long as her water supply is safe to drink and use, but she needs more information.

Poliey’s neighbor, Alex Nestasia, 51, has lived in Holbrook for nearly 20 years and raised his three kids near the airport.

“To find out some information like this, it’s very scary,” he said, holding a copy of the DEC letter.

Six private wells have been tested, Mahar said. Alternate water supplies were offered to property owners if PFAS concentrations were above the state’s drinking water standards.

Most homeowners in the area surrounding the airport are serviced by public water, said Mahar, which the DEC has already screened for potential contaminants, along with private wells in the area.

“Right now we have a good handle on those wells that were impacted. They were provided treatment,” he said.

Mitch Pally, chairman of the funding arm created to oversee the Midway Crossing air terminal and convention center proposal in Ronkonkoma, said he doesn’t know how the airport’s

Superfund designation may impact the \$2.8 billion project. The project, among other things, will connect a new air terminal at MacArthur to Ronkonkoma’s Long Island Rail Road station. He noted, however, that the project is not on airport property.

The State Superfund Site program, according to DEC website, aims to identify suspected sites with hazardous waste and make sure they’re properly addressed.

The DEC investigates sites where hazardous waste may have been disposed of with the goal to determine potential threats to public health or the environment.

The party determined responsible for the contamination usually oversees cleanup. If a responsible party can’t be found or they are unable or unwilling to fund an investigation, it’s paid for by the state using money from the 1986 Environmental Quality Bond Act, also known as the “State Superfund.”

Gov. Kathy Hochul proposed a new program in her 2023 State of the State address to offer financial assistance to municipalities to investigate sources of contamination and remediate affected sites. New York is also increasing investment in clean water infrastructure to reduce the impact of contaminants like the forever chemicals detected at MacArthur on the state’s water resources.

Mahar encouraged residents to sign up for the DEC listserv and said people should feel free to reach out with questions.

# Elmont-UBS train station full-time use

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO

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Major scheduling changes are in store for Long Island Rail Road stations serving two major sporting and entertainment venues, LIRR officials said Friday.

The railroad plans to launch full-time service at its new Elmont-UBS Arena on Feb. 27, and also discontinue service to Mets-Willets Point outside of event days.

Since opening in October 2021, the Elmont-UBS Arena station has only been served during events at the arena. Local residents and elected officials have, for years, pushed for the railroad to provide a full-time station to serve Elmont commuters.

“Elmont-UBS Arena will become a full-time station with train service 365 days a year, eliminating for many the need to transfer at Jamaica,” the railroad told riders in an emailed message Friday.

The station, located between Queens Village and Bellerose, will be served by all Hempstead branch trains, and also most Huntington and Ronkonkoma trains on

weekday evenings and during most of the day on weekends. The LIRR said the changes mean that the Elmont-UBS Arena station will be served by four or more trains an hour.

The changes come as the LIRR overhauls its schedule for the launch of regular service to its new Manhattan terminal, Grand Central Madison. With Elmont-UBS Arena becoming a full-time stop, the railroad is also discontinuing its shuttle train service between the old Belmont station and Jamaica during event days. The railroad plans to continue running trains to and from Belmont during the horse racing season.

The LIRR also announced that, starting Feb. 27, trains will only stop at Mets-Willets Point during event days, including Mets games at Citi Field. It’s a return to the service plan that was in place for the station before the COVID-19 pandemic. The railroad added Mets-Willets Point as a regular stop on the Port Washington line in 2021 because Citi Field was being used as a COVID-19 vaccination site.



The first LIRR train arrives at the new Elmont LIRR station in 2021. Elmont-UBS Arena station will soon have full-time service.