



## More jobs over MTBE measure

BY RICK BRAND  
STAFF WRITER

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Data showing Long Island has 30 more MTBE contamination sites than previously disclosed was cited by U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer yesterday as he built his case against the Republican energy bill.

Schumer, appearing at the Plainview Water District with state and local water officials, asserted that the proposed bill would protect oil companies from lawsuits and could cost typical Long Island homeowners \$260 a year for cleanup.

Schumer's vow to filibuster until the "safe harbor" provision is removed came as a top water district official expressed shock that Rep. Peter King (R-Seafood) voted to bar MTBE lawsuits against oil companies.

"This is not a party issue but an issue of the average middle class taxpayer versus big oil companies," said Schumer.

MTBE, which Schumer called a possible carcinogen, is a chemical that oil companies added to gasoline to help it burn cleaner from 1992 to 2003, but the toxic chemical has also leaked into the groundwater.

The 30 new sites, from Carle Place to Montauk, were identified by Walter Hang, a water data expert used by Plainview. Hang said he learned of the sites by filing a freedom of information request for a state Department of Environmental Conservation study on MTBE sites that was never disclosed to water suppliers.

Spokesman Maureen Wren said the DEC since 2001 has investigated 60 Long Island sites for possible MTBE contamination, including the 30 Hang cited. Wren said 90 percent of the sites have no significant contamination or direct impact on the water supply. The remaining 10 percent are under investigation.

Schumer said the disclosure shows problems are growing. In Nassau and Suffolk, 155 wells are contaminated with MTBE, part of the 1,600 gas spills through the bi-county region, according to Hang. Experts put cleanup costs at \$700 million.

The Democrat's news conference was held in King's congressional district, only four days after the Seafood Republican, a past opponent of an MTBE legal shield, reversed field in a narrow 219-213 vote on a House amendment that would have stripped the energy bill of MTBE shield for oil companies. The bill passed the House and is now before the Senate.

Paul Granger, Plainview district superintendent, said he was "shocked" by King's vote.

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King said he based his vote on pledges by GOP energy committee officials to consider an MTBE trust fund. He said such a fund could make immediate payments for MTBE pollution rather than forcing water suppliers to sue.

"Being in the majority party requires judgment calls," said King, adding, "My judgment was to let the process go forward and see if we can come up with a trust fund that works."

King added that if local water suppliers are not satisfied, he will oppose the measure. Schumer would not criticize King, but said a trust fund will not go far enough.

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