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19 Suffolk County homeowners win new septic systems

December 16, 2014 by DAVID M. SCHWARTZ / david.schwartz@newsday.com

Suffolk County lawmakers and County Executive Steve Bellone Monday drew names of 19 homeowners who will get free advanced wastewater treatment systems.

The homes will have the systems installed in April as part of a county pilot program. The septic systems will be tested and monitored for six months, before being approved for more widespread use.

The county had 137 applicants, out of which 53 met all of the qualifications to participate in the lottery.

"For 30 years, we've been waiting for a better way of treating our waste," said Legis. Al Krupski (D-Cutchogue), who represents the North Fork.

Bellone said the systems reduce nitrogen by as much as 50 percent. "This is a giant step forward," he said.

Suffolk County has more than 360,000 homes not connected to sewers. In addition to providing the individual systems, the county is seeking state and federal grants to expand sewers in areas.

Lawmakers at the Suffolk County Legislature Monday pulled slips of paper with names on them from gift-wrapped boxes. There were multiple applicants in 14 of the 18 legislative districts. Some districts in the southwest portion of the county are almost completely sewerred.

There were three legislative districts where no systems were awarded because there were no qualified applicants.

System manufacturers donated the systems, worth as much as \$15,000 each, to the county.

The county will conduct monthly monitoring for the first six months, and then check the systems as needed over the next five years to make sure they're functioning properly, said Boris Rukovets, special projects supervisor with the Department of Public Works.

In the 1980s, the county had approved individual advanced septic treatment systems for commercial buildings, but the state later determined they were ineffective at reducing nitrogen. Rukovets said technology is better today and these systems have been working in other states.

The county will approve models at the end of next year for use at existing homes.