



# Watergram

Westbury Water District

Special Edition – February 2008

## Nassau County Health Dept Mandates Chlorine to Be Added to Drinking Water

**A**lthough there have been NO drinking water violations, the Health Department of Nassau County is requiring the Westbury Water District to begin adding chlorine to the drinking water it provides to consumers, beginning April 1, 2008.

Since 1972, Westbury Water's distribution system has been 100 percent free of bacteriological contaminants and has met stringent stipulations set by the health department. As a result, until now, the water utility has received a disinfection waiver and its consumers have enjoyed drinking water that is chlorine free.

This new health department directive to add chlorine is a result of the county's recent modifications to the conditions for receiving an exemption, making only systems that serve a population of fewer than 3,301 eligible for the waiver. According to the county health department, this initiative is based on federal and state laws that now require all public water systems serving a population of 3,301 or greater to com-

plete vulnerability assessments and emergency response plans. It is also based on Department of Homeland Security guidelines regarding public water supply preparedness.

*To rid drinking water of any chlorine taste, place an open container of tap water in the fridge for several hours.*

The county has advised the Westbury Water District, which serves a population of 20,500, that it must comply with state and federal security requirements to protect the public water system against terrorism and other serious emergency events. This, among other steps, includes uti-

lizing chlorination as a disinfection method, which is the most basic and viable measure of protecting the distribution system against contamination through acts of terrorism.

"We are disappointed, to say the least," explained Superintendent John Ingram. "Although it is not harmful, chlorine does alter the taste of the water, which will require some getting used to. But, with current world events, we can understand why this mandate was put into place by the county health department and we will comply accordingly."

Although the Westbury Water District has done everything possible to maintain its non-chlorine status, it has been required to be ready with the necessary equipment and materials at each of its plant sites, in the event chlorination ever became necessary. In fact, in 2007, the district began the process of changing its liquid sodium hypochlorite backup disinfection system over to a more modern method that utilizes calcium hypochlorite  
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tablets. For this reason, the Nassau County Health Department extended its original deadline of January 1 to April 1, 2008 to allow for the transition to take place before the district begins introducing chlorine to distribution system.

"While we had allowed for the equipment change in our 2008

budget, we didn't anticipate the added expense of the chlorine," explained John Ingram. "We are discouraged that the county notified us of this new initiative after we had finalized our operating budget, which may now require us to move an improvement project into the 2009 budget."

Prior to chlorine being

added, consumers can expect to be contacted by telephone from the district, which will utilize its new reverse 911 message system as a means of communication. Additionally, the public will be kept abreast of any new developments regarding this matter.

For more information about its chlorination directive in Westbury, call the Nassau County Health Department at (516) 571-3323



### **Q. Who determines whether or not a water utility will add chlorine to the water?**

**A.** This is not a decision made by the public water supplier, but falls under the requirements and regulations of the New York State Department of Health. The role of the Nassau County Department of Health is to enforce the guidelines established by the state,

which are quite stringent in New York, compared to the rest of the country. California is another state with rigid regulations.

### **Q. Is chlorinated water safe to drink?**

**A.** Yes. Many tests have been performed to determine that the amount of chlorine found in treated drinking water is safe to ingest. The US Environmental Protection Agency has established maximum allowable levels of "residual" disinfectants such as chlorine. In most areas of the United States, it is added to the water as it enters the distribution system to protect against germs.

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