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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**WESTCHESTER HEALTH DEPARTMENT WARNS PETROLEUM STORAGE FACILITIES
TO GET WITH THE PROGRAM OR PAY THE CONSEQUENCES**

Gas station and apartment complex owners take note! The Westchester County Health Department is getting tough on protecting our ground and surface water supplies from leaky gasoline and heating oil tanks by cracking down on violations of the Petroleum Bulk Storage Code (PBS).

“This is one of the many clean water initiatives we have implemented in Westchester,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “Nothing is more essential to our health than clean air and water and we intend to protect these resources,” he said.

Responsibility for enforcement of the code passed from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to the Westchester County Department of Health in 1998, making Westchester one of only five counties in the State with this responsibility. Since then, the Health Department has launched an educational offensive with three mass mailings and 16 seminars to bring the operators of PBS facilities up to speed on the Code and the consequences of failing to comply.

“We have tried the carrot approach, now it is time for the stick,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “Our drinking water, our bathing beaches and our environment need to be protected. We cannot afford to allow petroleum storage facilities to be poorly maintained - our health is at stake,” he said.

The stick, in this case, means an increase in inspections and citations. In 2001, 89 inspections of PBS sites were conducted with violators fined a total of \$37,050. The following year saw a dramatic jump in the number of inspections to 380 sites with violations resulting in fines totaling \$251,300.

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Within the first five months of 2003, more than 200 violations had been cited as a result of 237 inspections. Fines of \$93,913 had been levied by April of this year. “We will keep up this increased level of surveillance until we get the message across, and the number of non-compliant facilities decreases significantly.” said Dr. Lipsman.

The most common violations were expired registrations, failure to register all tanks, and overdue testing, which usually carry fines of \$1,000 per day. Facilities must register with the County if they operate motor-fuel tanks with a combined capacity of 1,100 gallons or more or if they operate a heating oil tank with a capacity of 1,100 gallons or more or a waste oil tank of any size. Once registered, a facility must declare all the petroleum storage tanks on their property. Approximately 7,500 storage tanks fall under the PBS code located at about 3,000 facilities. The Department of Health mails out reminders before registrations and tank testing are due.

For more information, PBS facility owners may call the Health Department’s PBS unit at (914) 813-5161. A copy of the code and necessary application forms are also available online at:

<http://www.westchestergov.com/health/PBS.htm>