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United Water gives Hudson River treatment plans to state

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WEST NYACK - United Water New York has taken the first official step toward constructing a facility that would send treated Hudson River water to its 266,000 Rockland customers.

The company has submitted plans to the state for a facility that would draw water from the river - where everything from polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, and the radioactive isotopes tritium and strontium 90 have been found - and make it safe to drink.

All three substances increase the risk of developing cancer, the federal Environmental Protection Agency has said, and have been a source of concern among environmentalists and others.

The plans show that 110 water-quality parameters were checked by the company as part of a sampling program, but no results are listed. The company checked for the presence of PCBs, arsenic, mercury and lead, among other substances.

Steve Goudsmith, the water company's spokesman, said yesterday that the sampling, conducted in Haverstraw and Stony Point, had shown nothing of concern.

"We found that the water quality is high and that we can create high-quality, potable water from it," Goudsmith said.

Sampling was done at the end of July for tritium and strontium 90, but neither was included on the parameters list because testing results had not yet come back, Goudsmith said.

United Water was required to address long-term supply needs as part of a negotiated settlement when the company successfully sought a rate increase last year.

The state Public Service Commission, which oversees utilities in New York, approved the rate increase. The agency is now monitoring United Water's compliance with the negotiated requirements of the overall rate case, but it will be up to other agencies, such as the state departments of Environmental Conservation and Health, to review specifics of the project.

Anne Dalton, a spokeswoman for the PSC, said yesterday that the agency had received United Water's plans on Friday, two days before the deadline imposed by the rate case.

The proposed plant would treat up to 7.5 million gallons of river water per day and is viewed by United Water as a long-term solution for ensuring its Rockland customers have an adequate supply by the end of 2015.

United Water provides the majority of drinking water to Rockland's homes and businesses.

Rockland relies primarily on just the rain and snow that fall upon it for its drinking water. In dry years, the supply can be severely taxed because of population growth and development. The \$79 million river treatment plant would offer a nearly drought-free and interminable supply of water for Rockland, the company has said.

No specific site has yet been identified, but United Water has established markers to assist a site selection screening process, Goudsmith said yesterday.

United Water representatives met with county Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef and members of his staff and the county Health Department on Friday, spokeswoman C.J. Miller said yesterday.

Vanderhoef has been among those demanding that United Water do more to increase Rockland's overall water supply.

Miller said the county was "cautiously optimistic" about the plant, but also aware there were elements in the river that needed to be removed to make it safe to drink.

"Certainly there are legitimate concerns about how those elements would be filtered out," Miller said. "There are a lot of unanswered questions that would have to be answered thoroughly and carefully before we could endorse this project."

Goudsmith said United Water would next go to work on finding a site, figuring out specific treatment processes and reviewing alternative energies to operate the plant.

The company must submit draft environmental studies and environmental permit applications by Sept. 30, 2008. The plant is proposed to be in service by Dec. 31, 2015.
