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EDITORIAL

Post It

Money may still be tight, but the East Hampton Town Board should be sure to set aside enough in next year's budget to pay for a properly worded sign to warn bathers that the water at South Lake Beach in Lake Montauk is unfit to swim in because of dangerously elevated bacteria levels.

The beach has long been a favorite of families with young children because the water is shallow and the bottom sandy. It's understandable that they ignore a sign that is already there, warn-

ing that swimming is prohibited simply because lifeguards are not on duty. But they might have second thoughts about letting their children get anywhere near that beach if they knew just how filthy the water is and what kind of health risks they are taking.

Consider this. In mid-August, a test by the Suffolk County Health Department found levels of a bacteria, enterococcus, which can be traced to human waste, to be eight times what are considered "acceptable" levels in the

lake. And it's not just a warm weather phenomenon. In November 2011, water samples taken from two streams that empty into the lake near the beach also showed elevated levels of the bacteria, with one of them recorded at an astounding 17 times the public health threshold.

The most likely source of the pollution is cesspools from houses near the lake. Some of those septic systems are simply failing and in need of replacement, and others are built too close to the groundwater, so that in times

of heavy rainfall, septic waste flows with that groundwater directly into the lake.

Accurately pinning down the many sources and eliminating that pollution is obviously a long-term objective that must be addressed—and one that will require raising public awareness about the extent of the problem. What could be a better way of doing that than by informing residents and visitors alike that swimming in the water they think of as pristine is in reality no better than taking a dip in a public toilet?