



ANDOVER, MA — A proposed large-scale battery energy storage facility in neighboring Tewksbury continues to fuel sharp debate among residents and officials there — and leaders in Andover are paying close attention as concerns grow about potential cross-border impacts.

The project, a 125-megawatt lithium-ion battery energy storage system proposed for an industrial parcel on Hillman Street in Tewksbury, has drawn intense opposition from nearby residents worried about fire risk, emergency response challenges, and the proximity of homes and senior housing to the site. While the facility would be located entirely within Tewksbury, its closeness to the Andover town line has raised broader regional questions.

Tensions Escalate in Tewksbury

In recent weeks, debate in Tewksbury has intensified, with public meetings marked by disagreements among local boards and emotional testimony from residents living near the proposed site. Opponents argue that lithium-ion battery fires, though rare, can be difficult to extinguish and may require evacuations lasting days. Supporters counter that battery storage is a critical component of the state's clean-energy strategy and that modern systems include multiple safety redundancies.

More than 2,000 residents have signed petitions opposing the project, and turnout at public sessions has underscored the depth of local concern. Issues frequently raised include evacuation planning for vulnerable populations, air quality impacts from potential fires, and the adequacy of emergency preparedness.

Why Andover Is Paying Attention

For Andover officials, the debate goes beyond the borders of a neighboring town.

A major incident at the Tewksbury site could trigger mutual-aid responses from surrounding communities, including Andover Fire & Rescue. Lithium-ion battery incidents often require specialized training and equipment, raising questions about regional readiness and coordination.

There are also environmental considerations. The project site sits within an aquifer protection area that extends across municipal boundaries. Residents and environmental advocates have expressed concern about the potential for contamination affecting groundwater resources shared by both communities.

State Review Continues

The project is under review by the Massachusetts Energy Facilities Siting Board, which has authority to override local zoning in certain cases. While Tewksbury has formally intervened in the process, neighboring communities like Andover do not have a direct approval role.

Andover officials have not taken a formal position on the project but have said they are monitoring the proceedings closely, particularly as they relate to public safety, emergency response obligations, and environmental protections that extend beyond town lines.

Additional hearings and public comment opportunities are expected as the state review moves forward.

Comments:

Ray Daniels

Besides the safety hazard of a gigantic lithium battery operation, in 25 years all these “green” energy components (solar panels, windmill blades, etc.) will be jamming landfills. Seems like a wasteful and inefficient strategy when we could take advantage of clean burning and far more economical natural gas. These energy policies are a big part of the reason why Massachusetts has become unaffordable for young people just starting their adult lives.

Patrick Courtney

Reply to Ray Daniels

Natural Gas wasn't so great when Columbia Gas almost blew up half of Andover.

Tewksbury Resident

This comment “Additional hearings and public comment opportunities are expected as the state review moves forward” is not true. Next week starts evidentiary hearings where only intervenors/attorneys will participate. There is no more opportunities for public comment.

John

Thank you for covering this story! It's been a political mess in town and we've been trying to get the truth out...this can absolutely impact Andover in various ways if something goes wrong. Wilmington is also aware of problems and it's drawing attention all around us. We have written to state rep Tram who sits in a committee that shapes battery sites being brought into towns. She's been no help in representing us here and seems to be part of the problem. It's all being suppressed at the expense of community health and safety.

Tewksbury Resident

The majority of the residents do not want this facility due to huge safety concerns. The Select Board and Town Manager have turned their backs on the residents. Barry Feingold and Tram Nguyen were WORTHLESS for this. Neither answered the emails they received. Tram tried to say she helped, but she did nothing. Very disappointed in all of them. I hope everyone remembers this come election times.

Dawn Sheehan

Thank you for taking an interest at the mess that's going on in Tewksbury. My family is an Intervening party with 4 Industry Experts showing the safety and environmental impacts of this Battery Facility. The safety has not caught up with the technology. The only thing 'Green' about this is the money our Town is getting. They are sacrificing resident and drinking water protections for an unsafe project.

Cheryl Harvey

I just sent this:

There are serious concerns and consequences of continuing the Lithium/Ion Battery Site on/near wetlands that could potentially run into our drinking water.

While lithium-ion battery storage sites offer community-wide economic benefits, siting them near sensitive wetlands introduces several environmental and operational risks, primarily related to fire-driven pollution and long-term contamination.

1. Heavy Metal Contamination

If a battery facility experiences a fire (thermal runaway), cathode materials can be released into the environment through smoke plumes or firefighting runoff.

Toxic Fallout: In the 2025 Moss Landing battery fire, researchers detected nearly 55,000 pounds of heavy metals—including nickel, manganese, and cobalt—deposited in the adjacent Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Persistent Layers: These metals often settle in a thin, patchy layer on the surface, where they can be quickly mobilized by tidal action or rain into the broader wetland ecosystem.

2. Bioaccumulation in the Food Web

Wetlands are nursery grounds for many species, and toxic metals from battery incidents can travel through the food chain.

Species Impact: Metals can be taken up by marsh soil organisms like worms and invertebrates, eventually reaching fish, crabs, and top predators like sea otters or harbor seals.

Sub-lethal Effects: Lithium exposure in water can disrupt fish behavior, reproduction, and embryonic development, potentially leading to population declines.

3. Water Quality and Chemical Risks

PFAS “Forever Chemicals”: Recent research has identified a subclass of PFAS (bis-FASI) used in lithium-ion batteries that can leach into water systems, posing a threat to both aquatic life and nearby drinking water.

Firefighting Runoff: Applying water to extinguish lithium fires can carry battery fragments, ions, and organic compounds directly into shallow aquifers and surface water.

pH Imbalance: Leaking battery acids can alter the pH of wetland soil and water, further destabilizing delicate aquatic balances.

4. Physical and Hydrological Risks

Moisture Sensitivity: Exposure to moisture or saltwater can cause short-circuiting and corrosion within battery casings, potentially triggering thermal runaway or fires.

Saltwater Hazards: In coastal wetlands, saltwater exposure is particularly dangerous as it accelerates corrosion and can react with lithium to intensify fires.

We have enough contaminants in Tewksbury already: Sutter Brook PFAS Contamination:

Local resident highlights the EPA’s 2025 PFAS Sampling Report, confirming toxic contamination in town.

My name is Briana Garcia, and I grew up at 963 South Street in Tewksbury, just downhill from what many locals remember as Rocco’s Dump — now known as the Sutton Brook Superfund Site. For years, my family and I drank and bathed in town water drawn from the Poplar Street wells, which pulled directly from the same groundwater the EPA has confirmed is contaminated with PFAS “forever chemicals,” VOCs, and heavy metals. These wells were part of Tewksbury’s municipal water supply and were taken offline in 1992 after contamination was discovered — but for families like mine, the damage had already been done.

The EPA's 2025 PFAS Sampling Report now confirms what many of us have long suspected: toxic contamination from the Sutton Brook site continues to flow south, directly toward our old neighborhood. This is the same water that once supplied homes on South Street, Whipple Road, and surrounding areas.

The consequences have been devastating. My mother died of lymphoma and leukemia. My brother, Ryan Connor, was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma at just 22 years old — a rare and aggressive kidney cancer that doctors told us was almost unheard of in someone his age. I developed thyroid cancer and now live with systemic scleroderma, a painful and progressive autoimmune disease that affects my organs, skin, and blood vessels. All three of us grew up in the same home, drinking the same water, completely unaware of the risks.

No one ever warned us. No one told us our water might be unsafe.

In recent months, Ryan and I have been conducting extensive research and data collection on local health impacts. We've spoken with dozens of families who grew up or still live in this area and have now gathered over 40 health impact forms from current and former residents reporting cancers, autoimmune disorders, and other serious illnesses — many strikingly similar to what we experienced.

We're not looking for sympathy — we're looking for truth and accountability. The people of Tewksbury deserve to know how far this contamination spread, who was affected, and what is being done now to protect families and ensure transparency moving forward.

If you or someone you know lived near Sutton Brook or received water from the Poplar Street well field, we encourage you to come forward. Our stories matter, and together, they tell a truth that can no longer be ignored.

Briana Garcia

Former resident – 963 South Street, Tewksbury, MA

These are serious concerns that someone needs to address. Please stop this in this area. Our water shed/wetland areas deserve preservation. Folks living far too close need to be safe in their homes. Is anyone hearing our voices?