



THE DEP DIGEST



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FROM THE COMMISSIONER

This issue of DEP Digest, I would like to recognize DEP's Bureau of Customer Services, the division of DEP tasked with billing and collecting water and sewer fees, as well as administering DEP's metering and conservation programs. In the past year, BCS has worked hard to improve its service, and has become an example of the dedication to quality that all of DEP can strive to achieve.

Since January of this year, daily call volume to BCS's Call Center has decreased, from an average of 1,400 calls a day to 1,300 calls a day. In addition to a decrease in call volume, we have been able to improve how the Call Center handles the customers that do call us with questions about their water or sewer bill or meter. For callers, the longest waiting time before speaking to one of our representative has decreased by about 80%, from 35 minutes in January 2003 to just over 6 minutes today. This type of improvement can also be seen in the decrease in the average wait time for our callers – from an average of nine minutes until a call was answered to an average of 30 seconds. The Call Center loses an average of only six calls per day to abandonment – less than 1% of the calls it receives; this represents a twenty-fold decrease in lost calls since January 2003.

Recently, the 35 BCS Call Center representatives also received targeted training classes. These classes covered a number of customer service-oriented issues, centered around topics such as developing and emphasizing standards to define successful customer interaction. This was the first time that such training had been offered to the Call Center staff. Response from both the customer services representatives and the public has been positive.

BCS's continued customer service improvements are a clear example of how DEP can and should keep striving to improve its service to its ratepayers and to everyone who uses its services. Congratulations to Deputy Commissioner for BCS Denise Richardson, Call Center Director Robert Garcia, and all the staff in the BCS Call Center. I am proud to see that our agency is continuing its tradition of excellence, and I believe that we can be proud to serve New York City in such a manner. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you in the future.

Very truly yours,

Christopher O. Ward

THE PENN/FOUNTAIN LANDFILLS: RESTORING A REGION'S ECOLOGY

DEP is currently involved in a multi-year project to remedy the Fountain and Penn Landfills, located off the Belt Parkway and Jamaica Bay in eastern Brooklyn and a small part of Queens. These landfills cover approximately 400 acres of ground, and are composed of tens of millions of cubic yards of municipal and industrial waste deposited at the sites until the mid-1980s, when the landfills were closed. In the beginning of the 1990s, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and New York City entered into a consent decree to cap the Penn and Fountain Landfills. Concerned that rainfall filtering through the uncovered hazardous waste deposited was having a negative effect on the water quality of Jamaica Bay, State regulators mandated that New York City act to seal the landfills with impermeable covers.



The Fountain Landfill in Brooklyn

In addition to capping the landfills, DEP is embarking on a unique remediation of the sites; whereas similar projects have used lawn grass to cover the landfill cap, DEP is using plant life that is indigenous to the region, including some species that have been extirpated from the area for years; at the

end of planting phase of the project, the Agency will have planted over 40,000 trees and shrubs. At the same time DEP is protecting the water quality of Jamaica Bay, we will also be creating an enormous seed source, enabling once-absent species of trees and plant life to be disseminated throughout New York City again.

DEP's remediation plan for the landfill sites is unique and innovative in its use of regional tree and shrubs on the landfills' caps. In the past, there has been a worry regarding the use of trees, for fear that the trees' root systems would puncture the impermeable covering of the landfill. However, DEP's research has shown that root systems for trees do not extend as deep below ground as commonly believed, and would not cause damage to the cover. Using this research, DEP was able to show other communities and our regulators that our landfill remediation program was possible. DEP's efforts will help to reclaim a region of the City that until recently had lost much of its ecological value, making it beneficial once again.

DEP Digest Profile: The BWSO Leak Detection Unit

Under New York City's streets, miles of water mains and supply lines deliver over a billion gallons of drinking water every day to the City's residents. Built over the past century, this water conveyance infrastructure is in need of constant monitoring and inspection, and in some instances, rehabilitation. DEP's Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations makes sure the City's delivery system continues to function properly.

BWSO's Leak Detection Unit, based in Upper Manhattan, has the important mission of testing the integrity of this vital part of New York City's infrastructure. DEP Digest recently had the opportunity to speak with George Hinz, who leads the Unit, and also had the fortune of spending a morning with some of its members - John Lobello, Adam Calbo, and Julio Alonzo - checking water mains and supply lines in the neighborhoods near DEP's LeFrak offices.

The Leak Detection Unit was created in the late 1970s, under the guidance of Doug Greeley (now Deputy Commissioner for BWSO), as the City searched for more ways to conserve water. Hinz pointed out "at first, leak detection was met with some skepticism – if no leak was visible in the street and there was no water in a basement, how could there be a leak? Then we'd dig, and we'd find water."

Leak detection is now one of DEP's most effective means of combating water waste and ensuring our distribution infrastructure retains its integrity. The technology behind leak detection has become more refined in the past 25 years, but still relies on one basic principle: sound. At every intersection and at every fire hydrant there are access points for the distribution system – for example, a manhole cover that reads "DWS" would cover a water main valve at one of the City's intersections. The Leak Detection Unit is tasked with inspecting and testing every one of these access points to (continued on reverse ...)



DEP's Watershed Land Acquisition Program Continues to Grow: An Update

Considered a cornerstone of the City's 1997 Watershed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), a comprehensive Land Acquisition Program allows New York City to purchase land and conservation easements in the Catskill, Delaware, and Croton watersheds, in those priority areas that contain streams, wetlands, floodplains, and other areas critical to maintaining high water quality. Land acquisition and proper stewardship can protect the natural resources that filter pollutants before they reach reservoirs.

Before the MOA went into effect in 1997, the City owned over 78,000 acres of land throughout the watersheds, including those covered by reservoirs. To date, the City has secured more than 50,000 additional acres of sensitive watershed land, making it the second-largest landowner in the watersheds.

Conservation easements on other lands are also a valuable part of this program – agricultural easements allow farmers to continue working on their land, while ensuring that further, possibly detrimental development will not take place in the future. Other easements open up lands to allow for passive recreational activities while prohibiting other development.

The City has also purchased land and conservation easements in the Croton watershed, and has partnered with New York State on many of these transactions. The MOA called for \$10 million from the City and \$7.5 million from the State to be used for land acquisition east of the Hudson. As a result of the success of the Land Acquisition program to date, and the City's interest in protecting the Croton system in perpetuity, New York City is making an additional \$25 million commitment for acquiring more land in the Croton watershed. While the City will be constructing a filtration plant for the Croton water supply, we remain committed to a comprehensive, ongoing watershed protection program. DEP's Land Acquisition Program plans to initiate solicitation efforts in Westchester and Putnam counties immediately.

Land acquisition is one of the many ways - including forestry planning, aiding the development of farm management plans, and infrastructure rehabilitation - that DEP is protecting our water supply and the health of our watersheds. By increasing the resources we dedicate to the watersheds' protection, we're working to ensure a safe, high-quality water supply for years to come.



The Croton Watershed

(Profile: Leak Detection, cont'd ...) detect leaks throughout the system. Every day, teams of four inspect the system, stopping at every access point and listening for the water running through the pipe.

"We operate on the theory that water traveling through an unbroken pipe runs silent; if there's a leak, it will cause a disturbance in the flow of the water, and we'll hear something," says John Lobello, a supervisor with the Unit. If the Unit uncovers the sound of a leak – a rushing sound – it is able to use a locating device to find the leak along the pipe. The Unit then marks the spot for repair crews to find later.

The 19 members of the Leak Detection Unit perform two main types of work, responding to complaints and surveying the system. Complaint responses generally occur when a leak has been reported, but inspectors are unable to find its source. The inspectors then call the Unit, which uses its special equipment to locate the leak, whether it exists along a water main under the street, or on a supply line leading from the main into a building. The Unit also focuses on surveying the system of leaks that may be undetected. According to NYS-DEC regulations, the City's drinking water distribution system must be inspected regularly with sounding equipment to ensure its integrity. Each section of the system is on a survey cycle, and over a three-year period the City's entire system is checked for leaks. Since June 2003, the Leak Detection Unit has surveyed over 20 million linear feet of the system, locating over 190 leaks in need of repair.

Responding to complaints and continuing to survey the City's distribution infrastructure has led to substantial volumes of water conserved. In June 2003, the Unit was able to detect leaks in the system that totaled over one million gallons of water per day. In the City's last fiscal year, the Unit was able to locate leaks in the system that amounted to an estimated 60 million gallons of water per day, ensuring that the City's most precious resource will not go to waste.

DEP Digest thanks the George Hinz, John Lobello, Adam Calbo, and Julio Alonzo of the Leak Detection Unit for making time for us, and for taking us out for a informative morning of inspections. We located two leaks!

Revising the Noise Code

Thirty years since changes were last made to it, New York City's Noise Code is going under revision once again. Since the City has changed remarkably in the past three decades, DEP is currently in the process of updating the Code to make it reflect the City in which we now live. Plans to bring the Noise Code up to date have been in the works for some time, and in the past year, DEP has accelerated the process, making it a priority to redesign the Code to take into account changes in technology and equipment that didn't exist when the Noise Code was last modified.

DEP plans to draft recommended changes to the Code for the City Council to consider next year. These recommendations will give definition to previously vague determinations for what constitutes unreasonable noise violations - violations that are then adjudicated by the Environmental Control Board. At this time, the Agency is working to find a balance, allowing for the unavoidable noise that is generated by a city like New York, while addressing the very real noise problems New Yorkers face every day.

A NEW RESOURCE FOR DEP EMPLOYEES

The Office of Information Technology (OIT) has created a centralized DEP IT Help Desk to assist all DEP employees. The new Help Desk can assist you with managing your e-mail account, resetting your passwords, software and hardware problems, as well as explain to you why the network is slow or why a particular application is not working. The Help Desk is staffed by OIT employees, who can assist you with most of your computer, e-mail, and networking problems. If they are unable to, they will route your problem to a specialist, who will then work with you to resolve whatever problem you may have. To reach the Help Desk, please call extension 4160, or e-mail to Help Desk in Outlook.

CONGRATULATIONS!

- On Sunday, October 19th, 18 DEP employees participated in the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk. Together they collected \$2,387!
- In October, DEP was awarded the Gold Award for Competitiveness Achievement by the Association of Municipal Water Authorities, for its working on improving efficiency and service throughout the Agency.