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DEP Holds 23rd Annual Operations Challenge

Four Teams Compete in Events that Test Skills of Wastewater Treatment Plant Operators

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway today kicked off the 23rd annual Operations Challenge competition in which wastewater treatment plant operators compete to showcase the expertise and skills required to operate and maintain New York City's 14 wastewater treatment plants. After competing in five events that represent a cross section of essential wastewater treatment operations, the two winning teams will move on to compete at the statewide competition in June. The morning-long event is co-sponsored by the Water Environment Federation and DEP, and was held at the Jamaica Wastewater Treatment Plant in Queens.

"New York City produces more than one billion gallons of wastewater each day," said Environmental Protection Commissioner Holloway. "We have 1,900 dedicated wastewater treatment employees who do crucial work to ensure that our surrounding waterways are protected. Mayor Bloomberg has also committed billions of dollars upgrading our 14 wastewater treatment plants. As a result of this investment and the hard work of our employees, our harbor is the cleanest and healthiest it has been in 100 years. Today's competition tests the critical skills - including worker safety - that our operators exhibit each day. I applaud the teams competing today and wish them luck."

This year's four competing teams - the Sludge Fellas, the Trash Talkers, the River Rats and the Generators - hail from the Owls Head, Tallman Island and North River wastewater treatment plants. Each team will compete in five timed events, including:

- ▶ *Collections:* Teams respond to a leaking pipe and repair it while it remains in service.
- ▶ *Water Quality Testing:* Teams perform tests to determine the pollution level in water to see if it meets discharge standards.
- ▶ *Maintenance:* Contestants remove submersible equipment, make the necessary repairs and return it to

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service.

- ▶ *Waste Treatment Process:* Teams answer multiple choice questions to demonstrate their knowledge of the wastewater treatment process.
- ▶ *Worker Safety:* Teams rescue a dummy in a confined space while checking air quality using safety devices and perform CPR.

The Operations Challenge is an excellent opportunity to showcase safety and training skills while recognizing the work of wastewater treatment operators. The two highest scoring teams will go on to compete in the statewide competition in June. From there, winners of the statewide contest will participate in a national competition in New Orleans in October. The Operations Challenge was developed by the Water Environment Federation, the largest professional organization representing the wastewater treatment industry. The event at the Jamaica Wastewater Treatment Plant is sponsored by a local chapter of the organization in conjunction with DEP, which has participated in the Operations Challenge since 1987. A team from DEP has made it to the national competition for 14 straight years.

Each day, DEP treats 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater. Since 2002, the City has invested \$9 billion to upgrade its 14 wastewater treatment plants. Because of these investments, DEP has achieved a number of milestones recently: reaching Clean Water Act secondary treatment standards for the first time ever – three years ahead of schedule; ending Federal probation and monitoring this past December that began in 2001; agreeing to a historic nitrogen-reduction program with the State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

DEP manages the City's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8 million in New York City, and residents of Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties. New York City's water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, and comprises 19 reservoirs, and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,400 miles of sewer lines take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants.

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