

It's Official – the Legend Lives...

The Story that Started it All Celebrates 75 Years and Counting

One of New York City's most popular urban myths – that alligators live in New York City's sewers – celebrated a milestone last week when Deputy Commissioner for Wastewater Treatment **Vinny Sapienza** joined **Brian Andersson**, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Records and Information, Manhattan Borough Historian **Mike Miscione**, and a representative from Borough President **Scott Stringer** to mark the 75th anniversary of the day in February 1935 when a group of young men in East Harlem came across a live alligator while shoveling the remnants of a heavy snowfall into a manhole near East 123rd Street. According to the story that ran in the New York Times (and gave it instant and enduring credibility) the men "discovered a live alligator weighing 125 pounds measuring eight feet long." Staring down into the manhole, the group saw the frightened creature wiggle around, as



it looked for a way to escape. In an attempt to remove the alligator from the sewer, the group went to a local store, got their hands on clothes-line, formed a slip knot, lowered it into the manhole, and successfully pulled the reptile out to the surface. You can read the entire account here [or](#) watch it on Youtube.

Since then, the Times has occasionally revisited the story, most recently in November 2009 [Deputy Commissioner Sapienza](#) attempted to discredit the legend with facts: the City's sewers are not alligator-friendly and it is unlikely that

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Spotlight on Safety

HazCom Training

Each year, DEP's Bureau EHS (Environmental Health & Safety) training staff conduct Hazard Communication/Right-to-Know (HazCom/RTK) training to its 6,000 employees.

Why is this annual training so important? The OSHA-issued (Occupational Safety & Health Administration) Hazard Communication Standard requires all employers to identify hazardous substances, label them, and train all employees in proper storage, use, and handling techniques.

The purpose of the Hazardous Communication Standard is to:

- provide a safe and healthy workplace when handling hazardous chemicals.
- train employees to recognize chemical hazards and protect themselves from exposure.
- provide a formal mechanism that identifies the chemical hazards in the workplace and the management/engineering controls necessary to protect workers from exposure.

Click here for more information on DEP's HazCom/RTK Policy. [or](#)

Commissioner's Corner



from the event here [which](#) included support from some fashion luminaries. We'll be pursuing more partnerships to make sure New Yorkers and visitors know that the best water they can get is right at the tap.

I'll begin a five-borough community outreach tour tonight in Queens to talk to residents about the work we're doing in their borough, and to discuss how water payments are being invested to supply, deliver and treat more than a billion gallons of water every day. The meetings are also a chance to hear directly from our customers and elected officials about their questions and concerns. Customer service representatives from Deputy Commissioner **Joe Singleton's** team in BCS will be on hand to help customers with billing issues, and I'll talk about the water rate study that DEP recently completed and what we learned. Details about all of the meetings can be found here [or](#).

DEP got a big dose of "chic" last Thursday when we launched a partnership with Aveda, an eco beauty products leader, to provide access to fresh, clean, great-tasting New York City tap water (NYC Water) at six Manhattan locations throughout Fashion Week. The goal of the partnership is to heighten awareness about the City's high-quality drinking water as an affordable, accessible alternative to bottled water and the waste it creates. The partnership was possible due to the hard work of **Connie Fitzgerald**, our Director of Marketing & Communications, and Plumbing Supervisor **Ray Gonzalez**, and Plumber **Paul Goldstein**. You can see more pictures

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Event Calendar:

5th Annual Coffee & Tea Festival NYC 2010, Feb. 20-21, 11am-5pm; 7 W. 34 St.

Fashion Week - Feb. 15, 16, 18, 8am-4pm. Aveda is partnering with DEP to provide free NYC water at select Manhattan locations throughout Fall/Winter 2010 Fashion Week. New Yorkers will be able to fill their own reusable water bottles with NYC tap water from free "Water on the Go" stations around New York City. [or](#)

Queens Green Business Summit

Friday, February 19, 2010; 9 AM - 2 PM; Queens College, Flushing NY

At DEP, everyone is responsible for safety. If you or anyone on your team is concerned about your working conditions, it's okay to ask your supervisor or your bureau's EHS liaison how they can help. If you've still got questions, you can call the EHS Employee Concerns Hotline. It's DEP's responsibility to acknowledge and fix unsafe situations, procedures, and practices. With your help, we'll not only get the job done, we'll make it safer for ourselves, our coworkers, our families, and our city.

CALL (800) 897-9677 OR SEND A MESSAGE THROUGH PIPELINE. [HELP IS ON THE WAY.](#)

Focus on the Field



Managing maintenance for the tens of thousands of pieces of equipment at DEP's wastewater treatment plants, collection facilities, and marine fleet is a daunting challenge. Scheduling, inventory accounting, tracking labor hours, monitoring assets, validating data, and doing regulatory reporting must be seamlessly integrated. BWT's **Hortense Taylor, Computer Specialist (Software)** is now working on the implementation of a **Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS)** to get this done. Under the overall direction of **DC Vinny Sapienza**, she is supporting the roll out of CMMS to all BWT facilities. Listening to Hortense talk about CMMS, one senses her enthusiasm for this web-based system and her enjoyment in training the workers who use it, as well as theirs

in finding the new system beneficial to their maintenance tasks.

"CMMS replaces an old maintenance tracking system that was very limited," said Hortense. She explained that to date "the system has been installed and users trained at Coney Island, Red Hook, 26th Ward, Owls Head, Newtown Creek, North River, Port Richmond and Hunts Point plants, with installation at the remaining six plants coming soon." She then talked about the benefits of CMMS: "It allows users to retrieve system-wide data in a variety of ways, so that tasks, time and materials can be grouped together to get things done more efficiently. It improves inventory control and reduces overall spending."

In summary, she added, "When BWT facilities 'Go Live' (on board with CMMS and trained), it saves the bureau time and money and enhances workers' performance. I'm pleased to have played a role in implementing this change in technology." After a long workday, Hortense likes to "Go Live," by going shopping, dancing, and horseback riding on weekends.

DEP: Then & Now



Then: Board of Water Supply police bicycle squad in charge of guarding the Ashokan Reservoir. The major influx of workers brought with it criminal activity ranging from drunkenness to assault and sometimes even murder. The police force was largely comprised of former military men who had seen active combat. 01/11/1915.



Now: The DEP Police uses state-of-the-art equipment and vehicles including helicopters, boats, and SUV's to protect our water supply. DEP's Environmental Police Academy, launched in 2002, was the first of its kind in the nation to provide training, experience and concentrated course work in advanced police tactics."

Ask Cas

askcas@dep.nyc.gov

Q. Upon reading the "Commissioner's Corner" article in the latest Weekly Pipeline, I was surprised to learn that property can be seized and sold by the City if there is an outstanding water and sewer debt owed. Did I misinterpret the article? If not, are there limitations on this type of property seizure? (i.e. high debt minimums, long default/grace periods, etc) Is this kind of seizure common in other municipalities in New York State?

A. Thanks for your question. Actually, the City does not seize property through the water lien sale. A lien is a charge upon real or personal property for the satisfaction of a debt ordinarily arising by operation of law. A "water" lien automatically attaches to any property that has past-due water and sewer bills. A property owner is eligible for the water lien sale only if the amount of outstanding water and sewer bills exceeds \$1000, and the owner hasn't paid his or her bill in more than a year. If a property is eligible for the water lien sale and the owner does not enter a payment plan or qualify for an assistance program—for example, the new Water Debt Assistance Program that we announced last week—the City will sell the lien to a Trust – in this case it is the Wilmington Trust Company – which, in turn, will employ a collection agent to attempt to collect the outstanding amount owed. The collection agent will send a letter to the property owner informing them they are now the collection agent for the lien sold by the City. The property owner must begin to pay interest to the lien holder (the Trust) six months after the sale date. A foreclosure action could begin as early as 30 days after the property owner fails to pay the first interest payment due. The ability to sell water liens when owners refuse to pay water bills is an important tool that helps DEP ensure that everyone pays their fair share for the more than 1 billion gallons of water New Yorkers use every day.

Did You Know?

...that after more than 70 years out of the public eye, a 540 square-foot historic sculptured map of New York's water supply system is now on display at the Queens Museum of Art.

(It's Official,... - continued)

alligators would choose to live in NYC sewers, and the likelihood of a similar incident recurring (if it ever happened in the first place) is slim to none. But don't expect this to be the end of the (sewer) line for one of the most enduring bits of Gotham lore; we'll make sure to send an agency-wide invite to the 80th anniversary. In the meantime, for those who remain steadfast believers, there are two sites maintained by Sewer Gators. One has over 20 stories nationwide of alligators in the sewers and the other has links to sewer sites on the web.

Milestones

Congratulations to the following employees on 25 years of service at DEP: **Jed Andrews** BWT, **Salvatore Campisi** BWT, **Dennis Cipriati** BWSO, **Edmund David** BCS, **Albert Irene** BWT, **Galina Kesler** BEDC, **Vincent Malveaux** BWSO, **Anthony Marchese** BWSO, **Andrew Morabito** BWSO, **Juan Ogando** BEDC, **Angelo Princiotta** BWSO, **Rupak Raha** BWT, **Raisa Rinsky** BWSO, **Vikram Shah** BWT, **Horace Williams** BWT.

We welcome your feedback! To submit an announcement or suggestion, please email us at: newsletter@dep.nyc.gov.