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Ashokan Reservoir - New York City Water Supply System


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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Update on North River Wastewater Treatment Plant Fire and Impacts

### Overview of Incident

The North River Wastewater Treatment Plant was taken offline last Wednesday afternoon following a four-alarm fire in the engine room that started at approximately 11:45 am that morning. At approximately 5:15 pm Wednesday, untreated wastewater started to be directly discharged into the Hudson River. The North River plant has been in operation since 1986 and treats an average of 120 million gallons of wastewater a day from Manhattan's west side from Bank Street through northern Manhattan.

### Status of Plant Operations

On Friday, DEP made significant progress in making the plant operational by bringing both engines back online and as a result, all untreated discharges into the Hudson River stopped Friday night as of approximately 9:30 pm. Saturday morning, at approximately 5:00 am, an electricity feeder that supplies power to the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant went offline because of an electrical utility manhole fire. Con Edison was able to isolate the failed feeder, which helped DEP restore internal power. Both engines started again in less than an hour, but as a result of the power interruption a pump connected to one of the engines did not take flow for several hours due to a mechanical issue related to the power stoppage. Because of this, the plant temporarily was able to treat roughly 104 million gallons a day of wastewater with primary treatment and chlorine disinfection; while the second pump was offline, untreated wastewater was discharged into the Hudson River at a rate of roughly 15-25 million gallons a day. The second pump was restored to service at approximately 2:00 pm Saturday afternoon, and the rate of untreated discharges quickly decreased until they stopped completely at approximately 3:30 pm on Saturday. Since then, intermittent issues with the plant's operations related to the fire continue to be addressed as they arise. This has not resulted in any discharges since Saturday afternoon.

Current health advisories have been updated based on the most recent water quality sampling. People should continue

### MORE INFORMATION

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to follow the advice recommended below in the Environmental, Health and Community Impacts section of this release.

Of the plant's five engines used to pump wastewater into the facility, only two engines need to be operating during dry weather to handle the wastewater flow into the plant. The wastewater that is being processed is receiving primary treatment and chlorine disinfection, which are the key components of the sewage treatment process needed to protect public health. DEP is still working around the clock to stabilize the operations that have been restored and is putting affected systems back in working order. Over the past few days, substantial progress has been made restoring secondary treatment. Two of the three critical systems necessary to achieve secondary treatment, aeration tanks and final settling tanks, have come online and are in operation. The third system—aeration achieved by blowers that supply oxygen to the process—is partially operating, with two of the three blowers needed to achieve secondary treatment currently online.

As a backup in the event of further operational disruptions, and to increase treatment capacity during wet weather, DEP is in the process of installing an additional pumping system in case any further issues with the existing system arise. In order to minimize the discharge of wastewater from the plant, DEP on Thursday began performing some small "pump arounds"—pumping wastewater flow out of an 84-inch sewer at West 117th St. in Manhattan that normally flows to the plant and pumping into a 42-inch sewer at Frederick Douglass Boulevard and 117th, which flows to the Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant.

### Environmental, Health and Community Impacts

The New York City Health Department has changed beach pollution advisories to beach closure notices for the following locations:

- ▶ South Beach in Staten Island
- ▶ Midland Beach in Staten Island
- ▶ Cedar Grove Beach in Staten Island
- ▶ Sea Gate in Brooklyn

**Beaches** The most recent water quality samples from the private Sea Gate Beach in Brooklyn have shown elevated levels of bacteria related to the untreated sewer discharges from the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant that occurred last week. Elevated bacteria levels have not been found at the three Staten Island beaches where advisories were in place. However, the Health Department, in an abundance of caution, has closed these three beaches as well as Sea Gate in Brooklyn for swimming and bathing until this beach closing notice is lifted. Signs are being placed at the beach entrances to alert the public to the closure. The four beaches will remain closed for swimming and bathing until the Health Department has made a determination that it is safe to swim. The decision to close these beaches is based on review of both water flow through the harbor and evaluation of actual water samples taken in the harbor and at the shoreline. Alternative beaches, such as Coney Island Beach, Rockaway Beach, Orchard Beach, Manhattan Beach and Wolfe's Pond Beach, remain open and unaffected based on current water quality modeling and sampling. Fifty-four outdoor pools are open for swimming as well. Call 311 to find the pool nearest to you.

Beaches and status changes will be available to the public through website postings at the City's beach website [www.nyc.gov/health/beach](http://www.nyc.gov/health/beach), at [www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov) under NYC Right to Know, and at [www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health), the City Information Hotline 311, and those who have signed up to Notify NYC will receive up to date status information relating to public beaches via Twitter, RSS, email and SMS.

Based on recommendations from the Health Department, the Hudson River, the East River from the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge to Verrazano Bridge, the Harlem River and the Kill Van Kull to the Goethals Bridge are not fit for recreational activities such as swimming, canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing or any other water activity that would entail possible direct contact until the recommended use restriction is lifted. Also, consuming fish caught from these areas is not recommended for anyone until the pollution advisory is resolved. It is recommended that individuals catch and release fish back into the water.

In the event of rainfall that would trigger a wet weather advisory, the Health Department will issue standard wet weather advisories for public beaches through 311, Notify NYC and its Web page. Descriptions of wet weather advisories can be found [here](#).

The New York City Police Department Harbor Unit is patrolling near the plant to ensure boaters keep a proper distance. The city Parks Department is restricting access to the river at the 79th Street Boat Basin and placing signs prohibiting kayaking, canoeing and other recreational activities from all city boat launch sites along the Hudson River and other appropriate sites. The Hudson River Park Trust as well as the Battery Park City Authority are also installing similar signs at sites under their jurisdiction.

DEP and the Health Department continue to take samples in the harbor and at permitted beaches that could potentially be impacted. For the most up-to-date information, go to the NYC Health website at [www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health), the DEP website at [www.nyc.gov/dep](http://www.nyc.gov/dep), or call 311. Individuals can also receive proactive alerts by signing up through 311 for Notify NYC, the city's official source for information about emergency events and important city services. Riverbank State Park, located atop the treatment plant, is open. Westchester County and New Jersey DEP are also performing water sampling and water flow modeling to determine any impacts on their rivers and beaches.

DEP will continue to provide routine updates on the status of the plant's operations and public health impacts in collaboration with the Health Department.

#### **Related Documents and Links**

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