

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

April 24, 2012

No. 25

## **DEP Holds 25th Annual Operations Challenge**

*Teams of Wastewater Treatment Workers Compete to Demonstrate Their Skills and Preparedness to Operate New York City's 14 Wastewater Treatment Plants*

Environmental Protection Commissioner Carter Strickland today kicked off the 25th Annual Operations Challenge competition, a test of skill and speed for teams of wastewater treatment workers who compete in timed events for the chance to represent DEP at the New York State and national competitions that take place later this year. Five DEP teams will compete in various tasks, including fixing a pipe, repairing a pump, and rescuing an injured employee. For 25 years, this friendly competition has showcased the skills and talent of 1,900 DEP employees who work at the city's wastewater treatment plants and collections facilities. These employees perform highly specialized tasks by treating 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater every day, keeping New York City running and its harbor clean. The two winning teams will represent New York City at the state competition to be held in Buffalo in June. This year's morning-long event was held at the Owls Head Wastewater Treatment Plant in Brooklyn, and is sponsored by DEP and the Water Environment Federation.

"This friendly competition is a great way to showcase the skills and preparedness that DEP's wastewater treatment workers need to operate New York City's 14 wastewater treatment plants," said Commissioner Strickland. "The expert abilities that will be on display show why our harbor is clear than it has ever been in a century. To complement the efforts of our dedicated workforce, since 2002, the city has invested more than \$7.7 billion to upgrade wastewater treatment plants so that we can enhance recreational and economic development opportunities near our surrounding waterways."

This year's five competing teams—the Sludge Fellas, Warriors, Sludge Hustlers, Avengers, and Harlem Pump Trotters—hail from the Owls Head, Coney Island, Jamaica, 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 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 Owls Head 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 16 straight years.

Each day, DEP treats 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater. Since 2002, the City has invested nearly \$7.7 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; and agreeing to a historic nitrogen-reduction program with the State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Today, New York Harbor water quality is at its best in the last 100 years since the city began collecting water quality data to monitor the ecological health of the harbor. Launched by Mayor Bloomberg in 2010, the NYC Green Infrastructure Plan lays out a comprehensive strategy to improve harbor water quality by capturing and retaining stormwater runoff before it enters the sewer system. The plan fulfills concepts originally introduced in *PlaNYC* to capture the first inch of rainfall on 10 percent of the city's impervious surface area in combined sewer watersheds over 20 years, reducing CSOs by approximately 1.5 billion gallons per year. Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and other structural elements to absorb and evaporate water and to mimic natural areas and hydrologic cycles. In March, DEP signed a landmark agreement with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation incorporating the NYC Green Infrastructure Plan into Clean Water Act compliance. Under this agreement, the city will invest approximately \$187 million over the next three years and an estimated \$2.4 billion in public and private funding over the next 18 years in green infrastructure technologies.

DEP manages the city's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 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 and 95 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP employs nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. DEP has a robust capital program with a planned \$13.2 billion in investments over the next 10 years that creates up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/nycwater](http://www.facebook.com/nycwater), or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/nycwater](http://www.twitter.com/nycwater)

**Contact:** Farrell Sklerov/Mercedes Padilla (718) 595-6600