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By Reducing Water Use During Rain Storms New Yorkers Can Help to Protect the Health of Local Waterways



Expansion of Voluntary “Wait...” Pilot Program to cover Residents in Portions of Brooklyn and Queens; Improving the Health of Newtown Creek, Bowery Bay, Flushing Creek and Flushing Bay

Pilot Program recorded a 5 Percent Reduction in Water Use During Rain Storms; Informational Brochures are Available on [DEP’s Flickr Page](#)

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today announced an expansion of a pilot program that asks residents to voluntarily reduce their water use during rainstorms in order to help protect the health of local waterways. The expansion is targeted at residents from northwest Brooklyn to eastern Queens, including the neighborhoods of Greenpoint and Astoria to Bushwick and Forest Hills. By voluntarily reducing the use of water during rain events, residents in these areas can help to reduce pollution in Newtown Creek, Bowery Bay, Flushing Creek and Flushing Bay. DEP is the first water utility in the United States to pilot this type of program, which is modeled on a successful initiative administered by the Newtown Creek Alliance.

New Yorkers who voluntarily wait to engage in water-intensive activities during rainstorms, such as doing laundry, washing dishes or even flushing the toilet, help to create additional capacity in the combined sewer system. This, in-turn, reduces the likelihood of a sewer overflow into nearby waterbodies. In addition, any overflows that do occur would have an even lower percentage of wastewater to stormwater. A typical overflow in New York City is generally 90 percent stormwater and 10 percent wastewater. A 2016 Wait pilot program that took place in the vicinity of Newtown Creek recorded a 5 percent decrease in the demand for water from residents who participated in the program.

“While we invest hundreds of millions of dollars every year to build infrastructure that protects the health of local waterways, the Wait Program engages citizens

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and allows them to directly contribute to the protection of our environment,” said **DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza**. “New York Harbor is cleaner today than it has been in more than a century and with the help of all New Yorkers we can continue to build on this important progress.”

Council Member Costa Constantinides, Chair of the Council’s

Environmental Protection Committee, said, “This pilot Wait Program will help reduce pollution in our city’s greatest resource—our waterways. Volunteering to wait to perform chores like laundry and dishwashing reduces the likelihood of sewage overflow into water bodies including Bowery Bay. As we continue to have discussions about how to implement our city’s Long Term Control Plans to improve our sewer infrastructure, this is a step in the right direction. Thank you to DEP Commissioner Sapienza for his leadership on this important pilot program.”

“Combined Sewer Overflows are one of the major water quality issues facing Newtown Creek and NY Harbor in general,” said **Willis Elkins, Program Director at the Newtown Creek Alliance**. “There is an immediate opportunity for residents to reduce pollution by being aware of when sewage treatment plants hit capacity during rain events and overflow into local waterways, and then taking action to not create additional wastewater during these crucial periods. While we seek continued investment from the City to improve long-term sewer infrastructure and stormwater collection, educating the public about the impacts of our own wastewater, especially during rain events, is one of the few options that can be implemented today. We applaud DEP for this innovative approach to engage more NYC residents in this vital issue.”

“This innovative program gives every New Yorker a means to reduce pollution in our waterways each time it rains, and it’s a promising step toward cleaner water and a healthier ecosystem for New York City,” said **Paul Gallay, President of Riverkeeper**. “Our thanks go to Newtown Creek Alliance for inspiring this initiative and to DEP for committing to educate the public about our role in pollution prevention. Riverkeeper encourages everyone to sign up for these alerts, and we hope that broad public participation will reveal the need for even greater investment in wastewater infrastructure and management of combined sewer overflows, so that our communities can use and enjoy the City’s waterways.”

“The Flushing Waterways have long been plagued by sewage and stormwater pollution from Combined Sewer Overflows,” said **the Guardians of Flushing Bay**. “Many residents in the Flushing Bay and Flushing Creek watersheds are unaware that their sewage may be going into the waterways when it rains. While we educate the public on this issue, we also hope to bring more people to the waterfront to appreciate the natural beauty of the waterways. We’re looking forward to partnering with DEP to spread the word about this important program.”

The Wait Program will utilize real-time rainfall data collected at the Newtown Creek and Bowery Bay Wastewater Treatment Plants. When this data indicates that a Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) event is likely, text alerts will be sent to program participants reminding them to wait before engaging in water-intensive activities in their homes, such as dishwashing, laundry, showering and toilet flushing. When the CSO event ends, a second automated text alert will be sent to all participants, thanking them for waiting. DEP will monitor participant’s water consumption data through each building’s automated water meter. The program will run from April 2018 until May 2019 and participants can opt out at any time.

Like many older urban centers in the United States, New York City is largely serviced by a combined sewer system where stormwater that falls on impervious surfaces such as rooftops and streets, and wastewater from homes and businesses, are carried through a single sewer pipe to treatment plants. During heavy rainfall, the amount of stormwater entering the sewers can exceed the capacity of the system and a combination of stormwater and wastewater—or CSO—can be discharged into local waterways. Over the last decade, DEP has invested more than \$10 billion in upgrades to wastewater treatment plants and related efforts to reduce CSOs and today New York Harbor is cleaner and healthier than it has been in more than a century. However, CSOs remain the

city's top harbor water quality challenge.

More than 70 percent of New York City is covered with an impervious surface—such as an asphalt roadway, concrete sidewalk or a building's rooftop—which creates a tremendous volume of stormwater draining into the City's sewer system when it rains. DEP is engaged in a citywide effort to “green” the urban landscape, which will allow stormwater to be naturally absorbed into the ground. By keeping stormwater out of the City's combined sewer system, green infrastructure helps to reduce sewer overflows and improve the health of local waterways.

The ambitious \$1.5 billion Green Infrastructure Plan includes nearly [4,000 curbside rain gardens constructed by the end of 2017](#), with thousands more to be built in the coming years. In addition, working with partner agencies, DEP has completed the construction of green infrastructure at 48 [parks, playgrounds, schools and New York City Housing Authority \(NYCHA\) complexes](#). There are 24 parks, playgrounds, schools and NYCHA complexes under construction now, with green infrastructure installations being designed for nearly 200 additional facilities. In 2018, 300 additional sites will be added to the list for the construction of green infrastructure.

DEP is also investing billions of dollars to upgrade sewers and the wastewater collection and treatment system. This includes \$240 million to separate the sewer system near the [Gowanus Canal, Flushing Bay and Fresh Creek](#), \$55 million to maximize the flow of wastewater to the treatment plants benefitting [Westchester Creek and Flushing Bay](#), \$455 million for an overflow tank and wetland restoration at [Paedergat Basin](#), \$30 million to construct a new interceptor sewer and improve flow adjacent to [Powell's Cove and Flushing Bay](#), [\\$210 million to upgrade a pumping station benefitting Coney Island Creek](#) and \$95 million to reduce overflows into [Pugsley Creek](#). In addition, DEP is in the early stages of a nearly \$1 billion project to build two overflow retention tanks adjacent to the Gowanus Canal, and has proposed storage tunnels, estimated to cost approximately \$3 billion, for Flushing Bay and Newtown Creek.

DEP manages New York 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 7,500 miles of sewers and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$18.9 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. For more information, visit [nyc.gov/dep](#), like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

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