

Commissioner's Corner: Hurricane Edition

With two earthquakes and Hurricane Irene, this has been a busy week at DEP. Over the weekend, 1,788 DEP employees were working around the clock to keep our infrastructure running, and our extraordinary team effort from all of our bureaus was a true test of our preparedness and response. DEP was up to the task of responding to the storm and delivering water, sewer, and other services critical to New Yorkers' health and safety, following the leadership of **Mayor Bloomberg** and **Deputy Mayor for Operations Cas Holloway**.

I'd like to personally acknowledge every DEP employee who played a role this past week, but as this was a team effort I'll highlight the efforts of various units of DEP that played a major role in preparing for and responding to these natural disasters.

Last Tuesday, DEP facilities in the city and upstate felt the effects of the Virginia earthquake. Later in the week, a smaller earthquake hit upstate. After inspections of all critical infrastructure both in the five boroughs and the watershed, we

found no impacts upon our system. Immediately afterwards on Wednesday, DEP staff began to plan for Hurricane Irene.

We are lucky that Hurricane Irene mostly spared New York City, but its rains had a devastating impact upstate. Ahead of the storm, DEP increased releases from reservoirs to enhance their ability to absorb storm inflow. Dozens of **Bureau of Water Supply** staff worked through the weekend to establish emergency operations centers in the three locations around the watershed that continued to operate through the hurricane. This was especially crucial because of the challenges at Gilboa Dam, which received record inflows, triggering the Emergency Action Plan and the evacuation sirens to initiate. Several small treatment plants were cut off completely but were manned during the storm, again showing the dedication of our employees. BWS crews are now busy rebuilding roads and other infrastructure and helping local county and other officials respond to the storm. Yesterday I toured the Gil-



GRATE WORK: Mayor Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Holloway, and Deputy Commissioner Jim Roberts inspect a catch basin cleaning by BWSO laborers Joe Sedita and Joe Greco from Brooklyn South Sewer Maintenance in the Laurelton section of Queens on Thursday in preparation for Hurricane Irene. Also on site were District Supervisor Fred Young and Supervisor Larry Gallina.

boa Dam, Margaretville Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the towns of Margaretville and Tannersville, which were hit extremely hard by floodwaters. We are monitoring events closely there and I'd like to give a special thanks to DEP staff located upstate for their responsiveness and continued hard work in the watershed during these trying times.

To prepare for the storm in the city, the **Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations** deployed extra sewer maintenance crews out in the field to inspect 115 flood-prone locations and to ensure catch basins were clear and able to handle increased flow. During the storm, except when winds were too strong, our street crews responded to highway and street flooding, inspected catch basins, and cleared local sewer backups (and even repaired one standard water line break, restoring water to 30 families). Before the storm, we also worked with the Office of Emergency Management to deploy Sanitation and Transportation street sweepers to clean and remove debris from city highways. On Saturday morning, I visited the Staten Island Sewer Maintenance Yard and the Brooklyn North Wa-

ter and Sewer Maintenance Yard to thank them for their efforts in keeping the city running and to remind them to put safety first when serving the city.

At our 14 in-city wastewater treatment plants run by the **Bureau of Wastewater Treatment**, plant operators inspected all facilities to reduce wind damage and tied down material and equipment before the storm. Extra crews were brought in for pumping station and regulator inspection and response, and together, they placed more than 3,500 sandbags around the treatment plants. Plant operators checked emergency generators, radios, flashlights, batteries, waders and boots, portable pumps, piping, and hoses to make sure that were readily available and ready to address any type of condition. Crews at many of our low-lying plants—including those in mandatory evacuation zones for residents—were prepared to, and did, ride out the storm, with safe in-plant locations prepared and evacuation routes mapped out. After touring the Port Richmond, Red Hook and Rockaway plants

Spotlight on Safety

Recent events have presented meaningful lessons about the benefits of good emergency planning. Emergencies can be completely unexpected like the earthquake on the afternoon of August 23; or events that we have little time to plan for, like Hurricane Irene which made landfall early Sunday morning, August 28. DEP responded to each successfully. No employee injuries have been recorded to date from either. A major part of the success was that established plans, systems and procedures were set in motion for each event. In the

case of the earthquake, Lefrak employees were safely evacuated, the building inspected and cleared by building staff and re-occupied efficiently. Can we do better? Of course. FMC, Lefrak building management and OEHS will be performing a review to evaluate the plan and take steps to improve communication and implementation. We are fortunate that there was no damage from the earthquake, and that we had the added benefit of a full scale exercise. Please click here to read the full article and get more information on emergency planning [🔗](#)

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. [🔗](#)

(Continued on reverse side)

Commissioner's Corner: Hurricane Edition

earlier in the day, I was especially impressed with the crew at the Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant, who manned their posts even after bridges to the peninsula were cut off. Their meticulous preparation paid off: all 14 plants operated continuously through the storm.

DEP Police helped secure Lefrak and played a key role in emergency services throughout our watershed communities. I'd like to thank our **Police & Security** units who provided critical and up-to-date information about Gilboa Dam after the roads became impassable and most forms of communication were lost except for police radios. After evacuating the 1st precinct, they set up a command post on Route 990V for the duration of the storm and continued to provide updates in very hazardous conditions. Not only did they help on site, they navigated through treacherous roads to escort expert engineers to assess Gilboa Dam, which they confirmed to be structurally sound.

In preparation for the storm, the **Bureau of Engineering, Design and Construction** assembled a list of heavy construction equipment that our contractors could make available for response and recovery. Now that the storm has passed, BEDC is working closely with the BWS staff to inspect the upstate roads, dams and bridges, and to mobilize contractors for emergency repairs. Thank you to those in our **Agency Chief Contracting Office** and our **Budget Office** for making sure that we have the means and the money to pay our support on time.

Here at Lefrak, we set up an Emergency Operations Center on the third floor of the low rise building and stayed throughout the storm. Thank you to our **Bureau of Human Resources** and our **Facilities** team for making sure cots, food, and other necessities were on hand for those who stayed throughout Saturday and Sunday, as well as emergency generators and electricians in case electricity was cut off from our office tower.

A special thanks goes to DEP staff who represented the agency

at the **Office of Emergency Management** throughout the storm and provided thorough updates on the storm's progress and the City's efforts to prepare. They were our frontline liaisons with other agencies and helped make sure that the city and the region worked together.

Thank you to the people of our **Bureau of Legal Affairs** for their hard work and for making sure we had emergency generators at Lefrak, and for working with the State Department of Environmental Conservation to keep us in compliance during this time.

The **Office of Information Technology** played a critical role by ensuring all information technology systems were functioning and that our communication within the city and the state stayed intact, by providing redundant layers of communication including internet, cell phones, 800 MHz radios, and satellite phones. In addition, the **Bureau of Customer Services Call Center** worked 36 hours to support 311 in handling flooding complaints; in all, they received and processed more than 500 calls so that field operations could dispatch crews. Thank you to each of the call center representatives who worked tirelessly to respond to New Yorkers' needs.

During any major incident or crisis, communicating information to New Yorkers is a crucial part of what we do here at DEP. That's why I want to thank our team in the **Bureau of Communications and Intergovernmental Affairs** who made certain that New Yorkers were ready and that their voice has been heard in the aftermath.

The one crucial element tying all of the work from all the bureaus together is, of course, safety. The **Office of Environmental Health and Safety** was present at every aspect of the preparation for and execution of the storm response and ensured that all DEP staff remained safe and informed of any potential danger. I am grateful for their diligent work and that all DEP employees made it through the storm safely. They will spearhead our efforts to improve our preparedness and response in the future.



PLANNING AHEAD: Commissioner Strickland confers with Senior Advisor Sergej Mahnovski, left, Associate Commissioner Matt Mahoney, and Chief of Staff for Operations Anthony Fiore on Saturday at OEM Command Center in Brooklyn.



CREW ON SITE: BWSO laborers Lonnie Ross, Joseph Carrington and Anthony Schiulaz from Queens Repair work to clear a storm sewer grate on the Van Wyck Expressway under the Grand Central Parkway overpass in Queens on August 28 (photo by Jonathan D. Woods/msnbc.com from the msnbc Hurricane slide show. To see the whole Hurricane Irene MSNBC slideshow [click here](#)).



CLOSER LOOK: Commissioner Strickland and Deputy Commissioner Rush inspect storm damaged roadway yesterday in Tannersville, Greene County.

BLOOD DRIVE — Thursday, September 1 – 6th Floor Training Room at Lefrak. NYC is facing a critical blood supply shortage due to the recent hurricane. Donations are urgently needed. Please [click here](#) to read the email from Commissioner Strickland.

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