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**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION HOLDS 26th
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*

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland today kicked off the 26th annual Operations Challenge competition in which wastewater treatment plant operators compete to showcase the expertise and skills required to operate and maintain New York City's 14 wastewater treatment plants. After competing in five events that represent a cross section of essential wastewater treatment operations, the two winning teams will move on to compete at the statewide competition in June. This year's morning-long event was held at the Owls Head Wastewater Treatment Plant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and is sponsored by DEP and the Water Environment Federation.

"Our sewage treatment workers are on the front lines protecting the health of our waterways, and the Operations Challenge is a great opportunity for us to demonstrate what it takes to treat more than a billion gallons of wastewater each day," said Commissioner Strickland. "Thanks to the talent and dedication of the nearly 1,300 men and women who work in our wastewater treatment plants, New York Harbor is cleaner than it has been in a century."

"The Operations Challenge is one way NYWEA works with DEP and other municipalities to bring attention to what wastewater system operations specialists do 24/7 to protect public health and the environment," said Patricia Cerro-Reehil, Executive Director of NY Water Environment Association. "Winners of this event get to compete in a statewide challenge and ultimately go to the international Water Environment Federation competition in Chicago IL in October, 2013."

This year's five competing teams— The Harlem Pumptrotters, the Cyclones, the Sluice Gators, the Warriors, and the Hammers —hail from the North River, Coney Island, Jamaica, 26th Ward, and Hunts Point wastewater treatment plants. Each team will compete in three timed events, including:

- *Collections*: Teams respond to a leaking pipe and repair it while it remains in service.
- *Maintenance*: Contestants remove damaged submersible pumps, make the necessary repairs and return them to service.
- *Worker Safety*: Teams compete in a timed confined space rescue while checking air quality using safety devices and performing CPR.

In addition, this year's competition included two additional events which the teams completed earlier in the week.

- *Water Quality Testing*: Teams perform tests to determine the pollution levels in water to see if it meets discharge standards.
- *Waste Treatment Process*: Teams answer multiple choice questions to demonstrate their knowledge of the wastewater treatment process.

The two highest scoring teams will go on to compete in the statewide competition in Syracuse in June. From there, winners of the statewide contest will participate in the international competition in Chicago, 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 international competition for 16 straight years.

Under the Bloomberg Administration, DEP has made historic investments to improve the health of New York City's waterways. Since 2002, DEP has invested approximately \$10 billion in wastewater treatment plant upgrades to increase capacity and reduce combined sewer overflows (CSO). Capital investments have included the construction of four CSO storage facilities with the capacity to hold approximately 120 million gallons of wastewater until it can be properly treated. These storage facilities reduce CSOs by more than 2.7 billion gallons annually. Conservation methods, improved operational practices, and regular cleaning of interceptor sewers have also reduced CSO volumes. Last year, DEP completed a two-year cleaning of the city's largest interceptor sewer pipes using vacuor trucks, removing more than 29 million pounds of debris and sediment and reducing CSO discharges by more than 100 million gallons annually. Since then, DEP has continued the process of inspecting and cleaning these sewers using other methods which have combined to remove an additional one million pounds of debris. Under the NYC Green Infrastructure Plan launched by Mayor Bloomberg in 2010, DEP will also invest more than \$187 million over the next three years and an estimated \$2.4 billion of public and private funds by 2030 to reduce CSOs by capturing stormwater before it ever enters the city's combined sewer system.

In addition, earlier this month, DEP received a top honor at the 2013 American Council of Engineering Companies of New York's (ACEC New York) 46th annual Engineering Excellence Conference for research and development of cutting edge nitrogen removal technology at the 26th Ward Wastewater Treatment Plant. The \$2 million joint research and development project resulted in advances to the wastewater treatment process that has reduced nitrogen discharges from the plant into Jamaica Bay by more than 3,000 pounds each day.

DEP is also investing more than \$1 billion to reduce nitrogen discharges from the four Upper East River wastewater treatment plants - Bowery Bay, Hunts Point, Tallman Island, and Wards Island - which will reduce total nitrogen discharges from the four plants by more than 52 percent. The work is being funded by DEP and is the result of an agreement between DEP, the Office of the New York State Attorney General, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

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 sewer lines 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 \$14 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. This capital program is responsible for critical projects like City Water Tunnel No. 3; the Staten Island Bluebelt program, an ecologically sound and cost-effective stormwater management system; the city's Watershed Protection Program, which protects sensitive lands upstate near the city's reservoirs in order to maintain their high water quality; and the installation of more than 820,000 Automated Meter Reading devices, which will allow customers to track their daily water use, more easily manage their accounts and be alerted to potential leaks on their properties. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook at facebook.com/nycwater, or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/nycwater.

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