

[Home](#)
Customer Services

- › [Pay Online](#)
- › [Ways to Pay Your Bill](#)
- › [eBilling](#)
- › [Account Information](#)
- › [Customer Assistance](#)
- › [Service Line Protection Program](#)
- › [Water Rates](#)
- › [Property Managers & Trade Professionals](#)

Water Utilities

- › [Drinking Water](#)
- › [Wastewater](#)
- › [Stormwater](#)
- › [Harbor Water](#)
- › [Long Term Control Plan](#)

The Watershed

- › [Watershed Protection](#)
- › [Watershed Recreation](#)

Citywide Initiatives

- › [Environmental Education](#)
- › [Conservation Programs](#)
- › [Air Pollution Control](#)
- › [Noise Codes & Complaints](#)

Business and Professionals

- › [Forms & Permits](#)
- › [Support for Businesses](#)
- › [Doing Business with DEP](#)
- › [Asbestos Abatement](#)
- › [Construction, Demolition & Abatement](#)

About DEP

- › [Inside DEP](#)
- › [News](#)
- DEP Featured In...
- Press Releases
- Public Notices
- Testimony & Public Comments

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New York City Wastewater Treatment Workers Compete in the 31st Annual Operations Challenge



Workers Showcase Their Skills and Expertise in Wastewater Treatment Operations

Photos and Videos of the Event are Available on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Vincent Sapienza today kicked off the 31st 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 highest scoring teams will go on to compete in the statewide competition in June in Lake George, NY. From there, winners of the statewide contest will participate in the national competition to be held from Sept. 29 to Oct. 3 in New Orleans. The morning-long event was held at the City's Jamaica Wastewater Treatment Plant, in Queens, and was sponsored by DEP and New York Water Environment Association.

"The Operations Challenge showcases the skillset and knowledge our sewage

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- › [Capital Projects](#)
- › [Careers at DEP](#)
- › [Environmental Reviews](#)
- › [Interagency MOUs](#)
- › [A to Z Index](#)
- › [Contact Us](#)

treatment workers demonstrate daily as they treat more than a billion gallons of wastewater each day,” said **DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza**. “I want to congratulate all of the teams that participated in today’s thrilling competition. Additionally, I would like to thank the dedicated men and women who work every day in our wastewater treatment plants and pumping stations. Your efforts continue to help make New York Harbor the cleanest it has been in more than 100 years.”

“We need a greater understanding of what happens when more than 8 million New Yorkers flush the toilet multiple times every day. Events like this bring this unseen amazing process to light! The water resource recovery operators, also known as ‘silent heroes,’ work 24/7 to protect public health and the environment,” said **Executive Director of New York Water Environment Association Patricia Cerro-Reehil**. “Today, we salute all operators and commend the individuals who are competing to show off their amazing skills that have such a great impact on the quality of our daily lives.”

This year’s seven teams hail from the Jamaica, Bowery Bay, 26th Ward, Rockaway, Hunts Point and the Newtown Creek wastewater treatment plants, as well as the Lower Hudson, representing the upstate watershed.

Each team will compete in three timed and judged events, including:

- **Collections:** Teams respond to a leaking pipe and repair it while it remains in service
- **Worker Safety:** Teams compete in a timed, confined space rescue of a fellow employee and perform CPR while checking air quality. They must also change a defective check valve
- **Maintenance Event:** Teams compete to respond to a severe weather condition that results in a pumping outage. They must restore the main pumps to service, and program them for emergency use

In addition, this year’s competition included two events which the teams completed earlier in the week:

- **Laboratory Event:** Teams perform tests on water samples to determine if it meets discharge standards
- **Wastewater Treatment Process:** Teams are tested on their knowledge of the wastewater treatment process

The Operations Challenge was developed by the Water Environment Federation, the largest professional organization representing the wastewater treatment industry. Today’s event at the Jamaica Wastewater Treatment Plant was sponsored by New York Water Environment Association Metro, a local chapter, in conjunction with DEP, which has participated in the Operations Challenge since 1987. A team from DEP has advanced to the national competition in 30 out of the last 31 years.

Over the past decade, DEP has invested more than \$10 billion in upgrades to wastewater treatment plants and related efforts to ensure that all the wastewater produced in the city is properly treated and, as a result, New York Harbor is cleaner and healthier than it has been in more than a century.

DEP manages New York City’s water supply, providing approximately 1 billion gallons of high quality drinking water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8.5 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 \$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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