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Healthy Jamaica Bay: \$23 Million Nitrogen Reduction Project Commences at Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant to Improve the Health of Jamaica Bay



Reducing Nitrogen Discharges into Jamaica Bay will Increase Dissolved Oxygen Levels and Improve the Overall Ecology of the Waterway

\$460 Million in Similar Upgrades at Jamaica and 26th Ward Wastewater Treatment Plants Have Already Significantly Reduced Nitrogen Discharges

Photos and a Map are Available on [DEP's Flickr Page](#)

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today announced that work began this month on a \$23 million upgrade to the Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant that will reduce the amount of nitrogen released into Jamaica Bay and help to improve the overall ecology of the waterway. The project is anticipated to be completed in 2020. This project complements the \$460 million in upgrades that have already been completed to reduce nitrogen discharges from the Jamaica and 26th Ward Wastewater Treatment Plants, which similarly drain to Jamaica Bay.

Nitrogen is a naturally occurring element that is found in food and other organic materials and is present in wastewater when it enters the treatment plants. Because nitrogen it is not a pathogen and poses no threat to human health, the wastewater treatment plants were not originally designed to remove it from the treated water before it is discharged into a receiving waterbody. However, more recent scientific research has found that high levels of nitrogen can degrade the overall ecology of a waterway by promoting excessive algae growth that can

More Information

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reduce levels of dissolved oxygen, especially in warm weather months.

“Ensuring the proper collection and treatment of wastewater is essential to protecting public health and Jamaica Bay,” said **DEP Commissioner Vincent Sapienza**. “Working with environmental groups and local partners we have seen tremendous improvements in the ecology of Jamaica Bay over the last 20 years and reducing nitrogen levels is one of many fronts we continue to push forward on.”

“Jamaica Bay is a vitally important ecological and recreational resource for the borough of Queens, and the improvement of its overall health is a priority,” said **Queens Borough President Melinda Katz**. “DEP’s efforts to reduce the amount of nitrogen released into Jamaica Bay will do a great deal to enhance the bay’s water quality, promote a cleaner environment and improve public health. The DEP, led by Commissioner Vincent Sapienza, deserves to be commended for its dedicated work to improve the health of Jamaica Bay and our City’s waterbodies.”

“Although nitrogen wasn’t originally removed from the water being released into Jamaica Bay, I am happy to see that DEP is following up on further research that shows how harmful nitrogen can be to the health of the bay,” said **State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr.**, a member of the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee. “With this \$23 million investment, the Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant can better protect not only Jamaica Bay and the public, but it also shows that the agency understands the concerns of my Rockaway constituency.”

“We, as citizens of this planet, have an obligation to protect the earth for future generations, and a big part of that is protecting our waterways from toxins,” said **State Senator James Sanders, Jr.** “I commend DEP for their continued efforts in upgrading the Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant, thereby reducing the nitrogen discharge that is released into Jamaica Bay, and promoting a healthier ecosystem.”

“Jamaica Bay is home to hundreds of plant and wildlife species. I applaud DEP for making this investment, which will protect the bay’s ecosystem and ensure that visitors can enjoy this local treasure for years to come,” said **Council Member Eric A. Ulrich**.

“This nitrogen reduction project at the Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant will be a big boost to the health of Jamaica Bay,” said **Dan Mundy, Jamaica Bay Ecowatchers**. “This project will continue to build on the success DEP has achieved at their other wastewater treatment plants around the bay in reducing the nitrogen load that is discharged into the bay. These reductions are resulting in cleaner waters and a healthy ecosystem - this is great news for Jamaica Bay!”

In total, New York City produces, and DEP collects and treats, an average of 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater each day. The wastewater travels through the City’s 7,500-mile sewer system until it reaches one of 14 wastewater treatment plants, where it is treated to federal and New York State water quality standards in accordance with the Clean Water Act, before it is discharged into local waterways.

The Rockaway Wastewater Treatment Plant currently removes approximately 45 percent of the nitrogen present in the treated water. The introduction of new, enhanced nitrogen removal technology, which converts the organic nitrogen present in wastewater into inert nitrogen gas that is released harmlessly into the atmosphere, requires significant upgrades to much of the plants’ supporting infrastructure. Work at the Rockaway plant will include the installation of baffles and hyperbolic mixers, new process air distribution piping and local isolation valves, new foam spray pumps and strainers, a new polymer feed system and storage, the repair of existing concrete and tank joints, and replacement of tank ground water pressure relief valves as well as the electrical support system.

As part of an agreement with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York State Attorney General, DEP has reduced the combined nitrogen discharges from its wastewater treatment plants located along the East River by approximately 61 percent. The capital investments include:

\$277 million at the Hunts Point Wastewater Treatment Plant

- \$388 million at the Wards Island Wastewater Treatment Plant
- \$209 million at the Tallman Island Wastewater Treatment Plant
- \$161 million at the Bowery Bay Wastewater Treatment Plant

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than 9.6 million residents, including 8.6 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 \$19.1 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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