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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 29, 2019

CONTACT: Press Office / 646-885-5020

Press Release #19-63

www.nyc.gov/sanitation

NYC Department of Sanitation to Expand Syringe Litter Collections

Six New Environmental Police Unit Officers to Focus on Clearing Syringes from City Streets and Sidewalks

In its ongoing effort to help keep New York City healthy, safe and clean, the Department of Sanitation today announced the addition of six Officers to the Department's Environmental Police Unit, the specially-trained team responsible for picking up syringes from public sidewalks and streets, among other duties. The six new Officers will focus their work in the Bronx and in upper Manhattan, and will support efforts as part of the Bronx Action Plan.

"Our Environmental Police Unit works tirelessly in possibly risky situations to help keep their fellow Sanitation Workers, as well as City residents and visitors, safe," **said Sanitation Commissioner Kathryn Garcia**. "These new Officers will allow the Department to conduct proactive patrols in South Bronx and Upper Manhattan, as well as respond to 311 complaints and other requests for syringe litter collection."

"During the past several weeks, my office has received various complaints from community members about discarded syringes on the street. Thankfully, the Department of Sanitation is responding to these concerns by doubling the capacity of their Environmental Protection Unit to better serve Upper Manhattan and the South Bronx," **said Council Member Diana Ayala**. "These additional officers will help improve response time for 311 complaints and maintain the cleanliness of our streets and sidewalks. I thank the Department of Sanitation for their partnership on this issue and look forward to the results this expansion will bring."

"Problematic drug use is a multifaceted issue that requires responses from many angles," **said Health Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot**. "As we work to connect people with services and care, we must also address community concerns such as syringe litter. The Department of Sanitation's efforts will make a big difference in the community. I thank Council Member Ayala for her advocacy on this issue."

"We remain committed to doing our part in supporting the City's comprehensive Bronx Action Plan and support the addition of DSNY's new environmental officers," **said NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP**. "Working closely with sister agencies, to protect park-goers and to offer a helping hand to those struggling with addiction, together we continue to address safety concerns related to syringe debris in Bronx and Northern Manhattan parks and open spaces."

The Department of Sanitation's Environmental Police Unit enforces local laws governing the disposal of asbestos and regulated medical waste, responds to incidents involving the improper disposal of chemicals, household hazardous waste, low level radioactive waste, and medical

waste posing a risk to Sanitation personnel and the public. The Unit is currently comprised of six officers with specialized training to handle these tasks. The six additional officers focused on syringe litter collection will double size of the unit.

If a resident finds syringe litter in a park, on streets or sidewalks, or anywhere in the city, they should immediately contact 311. The proper Department will be notified for investigation and will take action to rectify the situation.

The Department has already started the process of hiring and training the six additional Officers, and the full team will be on-board in December.

Today's announcement builds on the Bronx Action Plan's existing syringe clean up and outreach announced late last year. The City invested \$450,000 in syringe clean up and outreach to people who use drugs in Bronx parks and public spaces. NYC Parks has a dedicated team that operates on the ground in the Bronx specifically tasked with syringe disposal. In addition, the Health Department funds outreach staff from local syringe service programs to visit parks and other public spaces on a regular schedule. They collect discarded syringes and talk to people who use drugs about safer ways to discard syringes; offer life-saving information to reduce the risk of a fatal overdose; train people on how to use naloxone to reverse an overdose and hand out kits; and refer them to drug treatment services like buprenorphine and methadone or social services like nutrition benefits or housing.

Since 2014, requests for the Department of Sanitation syringe litter collection have increased by nearly 300 percent. Since July 1, 2019, the Department of Sanitation has conducted more than 200 syringe litter responses, collecting more than 8,800 syringes.

About the New York City Department of Sanitation

The Department of Sanitation (DSNY) keeps New York City healthy, safe and clean by collecting, recycling and disposing of waste, cleaning streets and vacant lots, and clearing snow and ice. The Department operates 59 district garages and manages a fleet of more than 2,000 rear-loading collection trucks, 450 mechanical brooms and 705 salt spreaders. The Department clears litter, snow and ice from approximately 6,500 miles of City streets and removes debris from vacant lots as well as abandoned vehicles from City streets.