

## Special Guest Commissioner's Corner



**Vincent Sapienza**, DEP's Deputy Commissioner of BWT, is a guest commentator this week.

Across the country and around the world, wastewater treatment plant operators are dealing with a growing problem—sanitary wipes that are marketed as flushable, but do not break down in the sewer system. These non-woven fabric products do not disintegrate like traditional toilet paper and accumulate at treatment facilities. Wipes clog screens, cause pumps to seize

up and cost utilities millions of dollars in labor, equipment and removal costs.

According to a recent [NBC news report](#), wipes are now a \$6 billion a year industry and robust marketing efforts have resulted in a steady increase in sales. Interestingly, as sales of “flushable” wipes have risen, so too has the number of them showing up at wastewater treatment plants. In January 2007, the screens at DEP's 14 plants captured more than 4,000 cubic yards of debris. By January 2013, that number had sky rocketed to more than 10,000 cubic yards, including primarily wipes. Last year, more than 40,000 tons of improperly disposed wipes made their way through the sewer system to DEP wastewater treatment facilities.

This problem is not unique to New York City. According to a 2011 survey conducted by the Maine Water Environment Association, which represents

95 wastewater treatment plants serving more than 125 communities in the state, 90 percent of respondents indicated that wipes caused problems with their systems. And last summer in London, the Thames Water Company made international headlines when they removed a 15-ton, bus-sized, clog from the sewer system that was made up of improperly disposed of grease and baby wipes. The massive obstruction was dubbed “fatberg”—and work to remove it, and repair the damage it caused—took six weeks. Gordon Hailwood, waste contracts supervisor for Thames Water, said, “Homes and businesses need to change their ways; when it comes to fat and wipes, please remember: ‘Bin it—don't block it.’”

Improperly disposed of wipes do more than damage wastewater treatment plants and put homes and businesses at risk for sewer back-ups. They also cost New York City water rate payers a lot of money—more than \$3.5 million last year alone. And that is just what it cost the City to send the wipes to landfills. It does not account for the additional labor costs or time that is lost while equipment is repaired.

The good news is that a trade group for companies



that manufacture sanitary wipes, the Association of Nonwoven Fabrics Industry; the National Association of Clean Water Agencies; the Water Environment Federation; and the American Public Works Association have agreed to work together to reduce the burden of non-flushable disposable products in the wastewater system. Locally, DEP is also pursuing legislation that would prohibit wipes that do not break down in the sewer system from being marketed as “flushable.”

In the meantime, the best thing New Yorkers can do is to ensure that sanitary wipes are properly disposed of in the trash and not flushed down a toilet, where they create problems in the sewer system and at wastewater treatment plants.

## Spotlight on Safety

### Management of Change

The introduction of new equipment or processes in the workplace aim to improve efficiencies and operations, but it also represents a potential hazard to workers and the environment. DEP's Management of Change Policy outlines the requirement for an assessment of environmental, health and safety risks associated with new or modified equipment, structures, tasks, or processes, and unusual or

non-routine tasks. This policy supports equipment and process innovations that improve operations and the delivery of services, while preventing uncontrolled changes, installations or modifications that may pose a hazard to people or the environment.

Please visit [DEP's Management of Change Policy](#) for additional information.

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. 🐾



## Focus on the Field



**Krista Wrixon** would be the first to admit that safety is always on her mind.

“Every time I walk into a room, I’m looking at where the fire extinguishers are located and whether there’s safe ingress and egress,” Wrixon said. “I can’t stop thinking about it. I love my work.”

Wrixon has been with DEP for 16 years, most recently as the Bureau of Water Supply’s (BWS) section chief for projects and field compliance. In that role, Wrixon and her team of four safety experts examine contracts, work plans and construction sites to ensure that DEP employees and contractors have a safe work environment.

Keeping workers out of harm’s way is a huge task. Wrixon’s team reviewed or inspected 21 projects last week—and that is only a small fraction of the hundreds of projects that are active now, or are being designed and planned, that require their attention. These range from massive infrastructure contracts that are being prepared for bidding, current stream and forest management projects, to the daily safety of employees who collect water samples and examine septic systems.

“It’s all about keeping the work sites and the people who are going there safe,” Wrixon said. “We want to ensure that everyone is healthy when they go home to their families at the end of the work day.”

The call to safety goes far beyond hard hats and steel-toe boots. For instance, Wrixon’s group recently discovered that a project to replace guiderails along a City-owned road in

Delaware County included some areas where drop inlets were missing covers. The 3-foot-deep inlets were an injury risk for workers, so protective grates were added to the project.

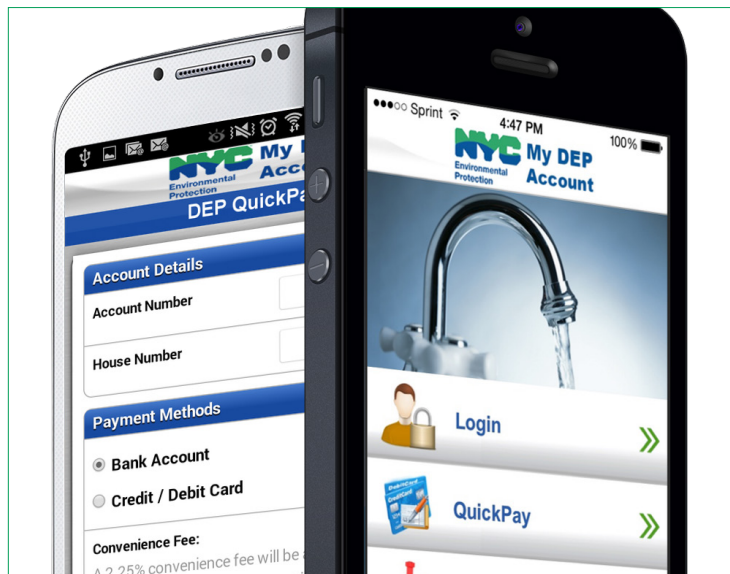
At a recent meeting to discuss the future replacement of bridges near Ashokan Reservoir, Wrixon discovered that the new bridges needed to incorporate more than just the safety of vehicles. Water quality experts often require access below the bridges to collect water samples for testing. Safe access will now be included in the design of the new bridges.

“Krista and her team are always thinking of ways to improve the safety of construction plans, worksites, and field access for DEP workers and contractors,” said **Charlene Graff**, director of Employee Health and Safety for BWS.

Before joining DEP, Wrixon worked for a contracting company that built the Pine Hill Wastewater Treatment Plant—one of seven wastewater plants that the City owns and operates in the upstate watersheds. And prior to leading upstate safety efforts, she worked on the engineering of commercial septic systems and stormwater construction sites to ensure the infrastructure was installed properly.

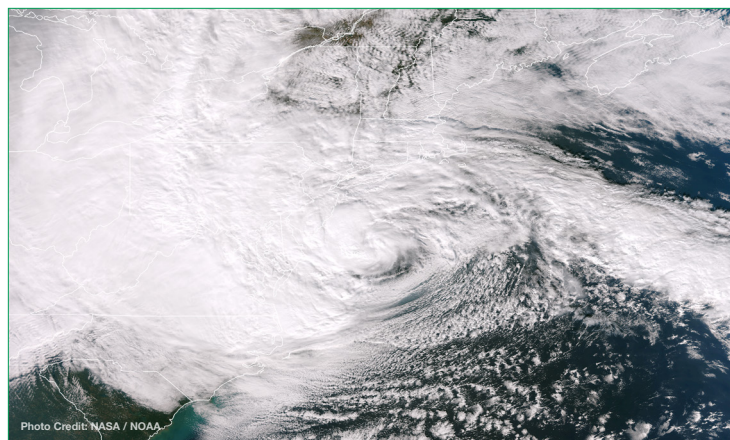
Wrixon lives with her husband in Kingston, where they just finished building their own home. She coached skiing for 12 years at several of the nearby ski centers, but now enjoys skiing for fun. Wrixon has two grown children and recently found out she will become a grandmother for the first time next year.

## Sneak Peek



DEP’s Bureau of Customer Services and Office of Information Technology are working on a new ‘My DEP Account’ app that will allow customers to view and pay their water and sewer bills, monitor water consumption, and receive leak notifications using a smartphone. The new app is due out later this year. Stay tuned.

## Coastal Storm Volunteers



The 2014 Hurricane Season began on June 1 and New York City is most at risk beginning in August. If the City opens the Coastal Storm Plan (CSP) sheltering system, all New York City employees will be asked to volunteer in centers or shelters, whether or not they are registered members of the CSP. If you have not previously participated in any type of training, you will be given Just-In-Time Training at the center or shelter. You may select any center or shelter that is closest to your home. Visit the [Hurricane Evacuation Map](#) for a comprehensive list of centers and shelters, including addresses and directions.

Employees will be compensated in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement covering their title or the Mayor’s Personnel Order for Original Jurisdiction employees. Please show that you care by offering your services to help our communities.

**We welcome your feedback! To submit an announcement or suggestion, please email us at: [newsletter@dep.nyc.gov](mailto:newsletter@dep.nyc.gov).**