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CONTACT:

Michael Saucier / Mercedes Padilla (718) 595-6600

MORE INFORMATION

NYC Department of Environmental Protection
Communications & Intergovernmental Affairs

59-17 Junction Boulevard
19th Floor
Flushing, NY 11373

(718) 595 - 6600

NYC DEP Releases its Climate Change Assessment and Action Plan

New DEP Projects to Incorporate Climate Change Considerations in Planning

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today announced the release of its Climate Change Assessment and Action Plan, a comprehensive report detailing the extensive work the Department has undertaken to better understand and plan for the potential impacts of climate change on the city's water and sewer systems. The report outlines specific steps that DEP is taking to refine climate change projections for New York City and its watershed region, better quantify risks to existing systems, integrate climate change data into departmental planning for new projects, and develop both short-term and long-term adaptation strategies for critical infrastructure.

Scientific data indicate that human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels and land use change, have led to a pronounced global increase in atmospheric greenhouse gasses (GHGs) since the mid-19th century. Customized projections performed for DEP by the Columbia University Center for Climate Systems Research and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies indicate that by 2080, as a result of these dramatically altered climatic conditions, New York City and its watershed region will likely experience a 7.5 to 8.0°F rise in temperature, a 7.5 to 10.0% increase in precipitation and a 15.7 to 17.7 inch rise in sea level.

Without proper planning and extensive adaptations, this degree of climatic change could have a significant effect on New York City's drinking water delivery, stormwater management and wastewater treatment systems. Preliminary analysis indicates that:

- ▶ Rising temperatures could exaggerate the frequency and severity of droughts and heat waves, increasing demand and straining drinking water supplies;
- ▶ Heavier precipitation could wash additional nutrients and particles into watershed reservoirs, elevating pathogen

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levels and compromising the viability of DEP's unfiltered drinking water system;

- ▶ Increased precipitation would also overwhelm drainage systems, treatment facilities and sewer infrastructure; and
- ▶ Rising seas could pose a similar threat to key in-city infrastructure, particularly coastal wastewater treatment plants.

"Climate change is a complex, emerging issue. The timing and extent of change is uncertain, and modifying large-scale infrastructure systems is expensive and takes time, but with proper planning, we can make significant progress and develop adaptation strategies that will ensure the long-term viability of our water and sewer systems," said DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd. "This report presents the many steps that DEP has already taken to address climate change, and it outlines the Department's plan of action for continuing to confront the most critical environmental issue of our time."

Already, DEP's response to climate change has been significant. Hundreds of DEP managers and system operators have been interviewed in an ongoing assessment of the potential impacts of climate change on key water and sewer infrastructure, and later this year, these preliminary findings will be further refined using detailed, region-specific climate projections from the Columbia University Center for Climate Systems Research and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Most importantly, adaptations have begun to be made. To contend with the potential effects of climate change, DEP is working to diversify the City's drinking water supply, develop more effective conservation programs, increase watershed protection measures through a robust land acquisition program and build new water quality infrastructure. Both the Croton Filtration Plant and Cat/Del Ultra Violet Light Disinfection Facility, currently under construction, will be critical to this initiative. DEP is also working to expand sewer cleaning programs, build more high-level storm sewers, implement sustainable stormwater control strategies, increase treatment plant capacity and waterproof and protect key operational equipment.

Moving forward, DEP is working to integrate climate change projections into the planning for all new projects. Wherever possible, engineering and design specifications are undergoing modification to account for future climatic shifts and changing physical conditions, and existing projects are already undergoing rigorous evaluation to determine if climate considerations can be integrated immediately. This integration of increasingly refined climate change projections with departmental planning will ensure that the city's water and sewer systems are more flexible and better prepared to manage and withstand the more volatile conditions associated with a changing climate.

Working in concert with the Mayor's PlaNYC initiative, DEP has also identified priority tasks related to climate change, and has begun to frame new initiatives within the context of future needs and projections. The PlaNYC goals to open 90% of City waterways to recreation by 2030, increase the dependability of the City's water systems, and reduce citywide energy use are consistent with a proactive climate change agenda, and will significantly enhance departmental preparedness for an uncertain future.

DEP's climate change initiative is led by a Climate Change Task Force, established in 2004, that includes representatives from all DEP bureaus as well as participants from the Columbia University Center for Climate Systems Research, the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, HydroQual, Inc., Environmental Engineers & Scientists, the New York City Office of Environmental Coordination, the Mayor's Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability and the New York City Law Department.

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection manages the City's water supply, providing more than 1.1 billion gallons of water each day to more than 9 million residents throughout New York State through a complex network of nineteen reservoirs, three controlled lakes and 6,200 miles of water pipes, tunnels and aqueducts. DEP is also responsible for managing storm water throughout the City and treating wastewater at 14 in-City wastewater treatment plants. DEP carries out federal Clean Water Act rules and regulations, handles hazardous materials emergencies and toxic site remediation, oversees asbestos monitoring and removal, enforces the City's air and noise codes, bills and collects on City water and sewer accounts, and manages city-wide water conservation programs.

DEP's Climate Change Assessment and Action Plan is available as a downloadable .pdf online at nyc.gov/dep.