

Commissioner's Corner: Watershed Hurricane Response Edition

This week, DEP continued to address the impacts of Hurricane Irene on upstate facilities and communities, which in many ways were more significant than here in New York City. DEP is working with local communities to assist in the recovery and rebuilding while making sure we protect the watershed throughout this massive undertaking. The hurricane damaged roads, bridges, and other public and private properties in the West-of-Hudson portion of the watershed. Our effort has been and will continue to be robust, and I saw it first hand on Friday when I visited Prattsville, Cobleskill, and Margaretville with Deputy Commissioner for Water Supply **Paul Rush**, Deputy Commissioner for Operations **Kathryn Garcia**, and Associate Commissioner for Intergovernmental Affairs **Matt Mahoney**, where we met with several local officials and inspected damage from the storm, and also saw several DEP road and sewer crews in action.

From the start of the storm, DEP Police assisted with search and rescues throughout the watershed. The Special Operations Division search and rescue teams were assigned to the Incident Command Post in Phoenicia and assisted local authorities with the evacuation and rescue efforts in Shandaken. Flooding in the area caused extensive damage which prevented access by any means other than ATVs and foot patrol. On Tuesday, DEP Police bypassed collapsed roads through a 10 mile detour on foot to check on 150 residences, where they ultimately evacuated 19 people. DEP aided many other residents by providing basic needs such as medications, food, and water. The DEP Police also assigned an officer to the Schoharie County Command Post in Cobleskill to support their efforts and assigned extra officers to the Gilboa Precinct to handle local police calls for service in Conesville, Gilboa,



CLEANING UP: Commissioner Strickland reviews cleanup efforts by DEP crews in Margaretville on September 2.

and Blenheim. On Wednesday, our officers picked up pre-packaged, ready to eat meals in Cobleskill so we will have them in patrol cars to distribute where needed. In Margaretville, DEP officers also helped recover propane tanks, gas cans, paint cans, and even a safe containing personal items. DEP Police have been right in the middle of storm recovery efforts in the watershed and I commend them for their extraordinary efforts.

Last week, the **Bureau of Water Supply** deployed an impressive force of equipment and personnel to Prattsville, Windham, Margaretville, Mill Brook, Fleischmanns, Wawarsing, and other communities. Dozens of watershed maintainers and supervisors used dump trucks, backhoes, excavators, loaders, and chainsaws to remove debris. The BWS HazMat team also has been busy removing debris from water bodies. A Vector truck and crew from DEP's **Bureau of Wastewater Treatment** was deployed to clean manholes in Margaretville as were crews from **Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations'** sewer maintenance, which deployed flusher trucks and rodders to clean the collection system in the village.

DEP also deployed engineers to assist in inspecting bridges throughout the watershed. We are tracking dozens of other requests from affected counties and will continue to deploy resources where needed. On Friday, we received the good news that the Margaretville Wastewater Treatment Plant—which was taken offline and partially flooded during the storm—was operating within all SPDES

permit parameters and operating all processes. Thanks to BWS chief of wastewater operations **Jose Atkinson**, deputy chief **Erik Coddington**, chief operator **Tom Harrington**, and assistant chief operator **Gary Smith** and their staff for their hard work.

Our in-city Bureau of Wastewater Treatment has also pitched in to upstate recovery operations. One location where their work was critical was at the Tannersville Wastewater Treatment Plant, where a 150-foot section of road was washed away near the plant. Thanks to **Michael Portannese**, **Jose Rosa**, **Colvin Stephen**, **Michael Giudice**, **Jose Acevedo**, **Edwin Campuzano**, **Edward Calderon**, **Rafeek Rahaman** and Wards Island plant superintendent **John McCabe** for their hard work in the Tannersville pump-around project, which involved dewatering a stream to allow a new sewer crossing to be installed. In addition to the work on upstate wastewater infrastructure, DEP's BWSO leak detection crews surveyed the Margaretville water supply system.

Also on Friday, in order to ensure that cleanup efforts can be implemented as quickly and efficiently as possible, DEP suspended enforcement of certain watershed rules and regulations in its West-of-Hudson watershed provided they are taken in response to Hurricane Irene and are necessary to protect life, health, property, and natural resources and are conducted with easily adopted, common-sense protections. Activities covered by the policy include certain

Spotlight on Safety

DEP's Training Tracking Reporting System (TTRS)

As part of DEP's Strategy 2011-2014 goals to innovate and implement best practices, the Office of Environmental, Health and Safety (OEHS) is implementing a centralized training administration software system to store all agency training information— TTRS.

TTRS has a number of significant benefits to employees and management:

- TTRS will allow for the elimination of redundant systems at the bureau level. Through one centralized system, both employees and management will now have accurate and timely training information including information on EHS and other training requirements, licenses, continu-

ing education requirements, and certification requirements.

- TTRS will improve the efficiency of training operations by simplifying training operations' workflow processes. Many manual and paperwork processes will now be automated including class registration, confirmation, and report generation.
- Employee's supervisors will receive timely alerts and reminders regarding upcoming training for their employees, and will be able to print reports on direct reports' training histories.

Watch for this innovative system to be implemented in your bureau in the upcoming months.

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.

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land clearing and grading activity, road repair, and repair or replacement of septic treatment systems or sewer networks. Thank you to **Hilary Meltzer** of the City's Law Department and our own legal team, especially **Robin Levine**, in ensuring that this got done as expeditiously as possible while obtaining the approval of the EPA and State DOH that these actions are consistent with our Filtration Avoidance Determination. I would like to thank the EPA and State DOH for their actions to make this possible.

As is expected with a storm of this magnitude, or as happens with some storms of lesser magnitude, turbidity levels on the Catskill system have risen. DEP adjusts intake levels and aqueduct flows to make sure we achieve the best water quality possible from our 19 reservoirs, which have multiple interconnections. The system can hold up to 580 billion gallons, which leads to long retention times that allow settling. In addition DEP can release the more turbid water from the west basin of the Ashokan Reservoir to keep it out of our drinking water system. I would like to thank DEC Commissioner **Joe Martens** and his team for working closely with us on waste channel releases and other measures to protect water quality.

DEP can also treat some of our water with alum at Kensico Reservoir to protect the water quality entering the distribution system. Alum causes the natural turbidity in water to coagulate and settle in the reservoir before it reaches the intakes to the city's distribution system, and is used by DEP occasionally following significant storm events. DEP continues to actively monitor water quality within the entire system to ensure that the quality of water delivered to consumers remains high. Water quality testing is occurring around the clock and testing at our reservoir locations has been increased. Thanks to the hard work of our employees, the water quality entering the distribution system remains of high quality, meets water quality standards, and remains relatively unchanged from before the storm. I would like to thank Director of Water Quality **Steve Schindler** and his staff for their increased efforts in water quality monitoring, including **Lori Emery**, **Charles Cutietta-Olson**, **Dale Borchert**, **Andy Bader**, **Kirsten Lewis-Askildsen**, and **Tracy Lawrence**, all of the Watershed Water Quality Operations staff at the Kingston, Gra-

hamsville, Kensico, and Sutton Park facilities; **David Lipsky**, **Yves Mikol**, **John Canning** and the Early Warning Remote Monitoring staff; and Director of Operations **Tina Johnstone** and her staff for the operational and treatment adjustments they are making, including **Mark Donecker**, **John Vickers**, **Bradley Dromazos**, **Dan Massi**, and their staff, who help determine reservoir releases and diversions, perform reservoir stop shutter changes (to get to the best water quality), continue chlorination and alum treatment, and manipulating reservoir operational modes at all hours of the night and day in order to ensure NYC continues to receive high quality water.

DEP is also providing technical assistance for the cleanup of Catskill streams after the flood. If done improperly, stream cleanups can lead to long-term water quality impacts. Thanks to Assistant Commissioner **Dave Warne** and his staff, including **Danny Davis** and **Beth Reichheld** of DEP's Stream Management Program, who have been out in the field every day since the storm, consulting with DEC and local officials to guide stream work.

Many DEP employees who have been out helping suffered damage to their own homes and properties. I would like to thank them for their dedication in the face of personal challenges.

On Friday, we submitted a post-storm incident report on Gilboa Dam to DEC, based upon inspections and engineering analysis by outside and in-house dam safety experts. The report concludes that the Gilboa Dam, which was structurally safe beforehand and is undergoing a scheduled \$350 million upgrade, weathered the heavy rain associated with Hurricane Irene and remains safe and structurally sound. The report can be found here: [6](#). Thanks to **Tom DeJohn** and DEP Police Captain **Brian Handy** for being on the ground during the day of the storm and providing critical observations of the dam, and for working with **Jeff Helmuth** and **Mark Suttmeier** and other staff to compile the dam safety analysis.

DEP's response to a difficult set of circumstances in the watershed has been impressive. There will be many challenges to meet in the coming weeks and we will continue to be vigilant in helping upstate communities rebuild and ensuring that our watershed remains protected.



HELP ON THE WAY: A convoy of DEP vehicles carry crews and equipment on August 31 to assist flood-ravaged communities in the watershed.



EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE: Commissioner Strickland and Deputy Commissioner Rush confer with Prattsville officials and Matthew Driscoll, President of the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation on September 2.



DEP AT WORK: DEP crews at work in Margaretville providing cleanup assistance on August 31.

We welcome your feedback! To submit an announcement or suggestion, please email us at: newsletter@dep.nyc.gov.