

## 'Training' Wheels Come off STWs



The Bureau of Wastewater Treatment (BWT) has approximately 1,900 employees working around the clock to ensure that DEP's 96 pump stations and 14 treatment plants can meet federal guidelines and properly handle the more than 1.3 billion

gallons of wastewater produced in New York City every day. From time-to-time, it is necessary to bring on new workers and last year 74 new Sewage Treatment Workers (STW) joined the ranks. These new

(Continued on reverse side)

## Spotlight on Safety

### Don't Forget the Paint!

Many paints used in industrial settings in the past (from about 1929 to 1970) were formulated to provide unique protection characteristics. This included the frequent addition of lead and polychlorinated bi-phenyls (PCBs) which provided extra durability, elasticity, water, heat and corrosion resistance.

When planning any renovation or repair work of painted surfaces at DEP, it is critical to account for the possible presence of these substances that have been associated with risks to human health and the environment. OEHS has issued a new DEP Paint Management Policy on safe work practices for projects that require the disturbance of painted surfaces that may contain PCBs and lead. Safe work practices include proper characterization, handling, clean-up, and disposal of painted surfaces, paint chips, dust and residue collectively known as "paint waste."

Proper characterization involves one of two actions:

- 1) Assume the paint contains contaminants of concern; or
- 2) Take physical (bulk) samples to characterize the waste.

There is also valuable information stored in DEP's legacy sampling database which can help inform employees who are involved with planning and carrying out demolition, renovation or repair work.

It is important to remember that intact paint does not pose a hazard. The hazards can arise during the improper disturbance or removal of paint or paint that is in poor condition to the point where dust is generated. Breathing in the dust and direct ingestion are ways these contaminants can enter the body and cause harm.

For more information see: DEP Paint Management Policy [👉](#)

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. [👉](#)

## Commissioner's Corner

To fulfill our mission to provide drinking water and wastewater services to more than nine million New Yorkers, DEP's 5,700 employees operate our system 24 hours a day, seven days a week in a highly regulated environment and also run New York City's largest capital program. Our challenging work requires the best workers in the field. That's why *Strategy 2011 - 2014* included a commitment to implementing a workforce development program along with recruiting top engineering talent for the foundation of the agency's continued success. More recently, as part of OpX, we surveyed our entire workforce, and the responses identified a need to improve the entire employee experience from recruitment to exit. I thank you again for your honest input—by participating in these surveys, you played a central role in helping guide DEP toward even greater success. We have already taken steps to improve employee training, but there is a need for new and strategic programs for employee development, performance feedback, and succession plans.

After an extensive, national search, I am pleased to announce that **Diana Jones Ritter** has joined DEP as Deputy Commissioner for Organizational Development. With more than 25 years of experience in the private and public sectors—including most recently as Managing Director of the MTA where she advanced several talent management strategies including enterprise succession planning and workforce development—Diana will work with our existing team to help DEP reach our goal of being the best utility in the country. Her role will be to integrate and improve the organizational functions that span the entire life-cycle of the employee's experience at DEP along with leading our recruitment of top talent from the world's leading engineering institutions. DC Ritter will oversee an integrated system



that begins with an employee's first day on the job and continues to prepare them for new opportunities and increased responsibility over the course of their DEP careers. She will also look for opportunities to improve internal communications to advance workforce development. Please join me in welcoming her.

As the largest municipally owned water and wastewater utility in the nation, we are also committed to providing the safest workplace possible for our employees, contractors and consultants. To that end, I'd like to congratulate **Mike Borsykowsky**, **Gerard Cox** and **Bernard Daly**, along with all BEDC and EHS staff for their work with our contractors Skanska and Tully on the Croton Water Treatment Plant construction project that is being recognized by OSHA as qualified for inclusion in that agency's Voluntary Participation Program (VPP). The Program recognizes projects that have implemented effective safety and health management systems and maintain injury and illness rates below national averages for their respective industries. The rate of injury/illness at Croton was 0.86 in 2012, as opposed to the national average of 3.5. The Croton project can serve as a model for the construction industry and comes at a time when we have implemented our own EHS management system to develop comprehensive programs to meet increasingly higher standards for safety and environmental excellence in all of our projects.

## Focus on the Field



**Duncan Schmitt's** job is similar to managing dozens of marriages.

Schmitt, a conservation easement manager who began working at DEP in 1999, oversees 156 conservation easements in the watershed that are held by the city on land owned by upstate residents. Those properties comprise 23,035 acres that help the city preserve and protect the land around its reservoirs and the myriad waterways that flow into them.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement that enables New York City to buy the development rights to large parcels of upstate land, while also allowing the existing owners to continue using the land in ways that are compatible with water quality protection.

"Because we essentially own these properties jointly with the land owner, it really is like being married," Schmitt said. "To me, the undeveloped land is our water filter, and that's what we are protecting with these easements."

Schmitt oversees the inspection of all 156 conservation easements in the Catskills and Hudson Valley. Each of them is inspected twice annually—once during an aerial inspection before spring, and once during a summer ground inspection.

Schmitt and other upstate experts monitor the properties to ensure they're being protected from activities that could harm water quality. For instance, this week Schmitt hiked up a steep, snowy path in Greene County to inspect a logging operation that was approved by DEP at one of the easements. Because trees were being culled near a stream that eventually empties into

Schoharie Reservoir, Schmitt and DEP forestry staff have been checking the worksite to ensure the loggers are vigilant about erosion control.

The city's easements restrict logging, the construction of roads, certain farming activities, and other uses that could harm downstream water quality.

Because the easements are partnerships, Schmitt is careful to maintain good relationships with the owner. Some have owned the expansive upstate properties for generations. Others own them as vacation properties and only visit them sporadically. And some use them for hunting or snowmobiling camps. Schmitt often fields phone calls from the owners, or prospective buyers, who ask what they can and cannot do under the terms of the easements.

"Duncan's experience in the details of land ownership and his easy-going personality is a great combination for a conservation easement manager. DEP is lucky to have him in such a responsible role", said Chief of the Natural Resources Division **Ira Stern**.

Before Schmitt oversaw the protection of watershed easements, he graduated from the University of Connecticut School of Law and served as a law clerk for a federal magistrate in New Haven, Connecticut. He left that job in the mid-'90s and returned to school, earning a degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental studies, where he focused on coastal and watershed systems.

Schmitt lives in Woodstock, N.Y. He is an avid cyclist and also works as a ski instructor at nearby Belleayre Mountain.

## Volunteer Opportunity

Parts of the Staten Island Bluebelts were heavily littered with debris in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. In an effort to restore these vital wetland areas to their natural beauty, DEP is organizing volunteer cleanup days on Saturday, January 19 and Saturday, January 26. The events are from 9:30AM to 1:30PM and volunteers are asked to meet at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Father Capodanno Boulevard along the Midland Beach Boardwalk in Staten Island.

If you wish to participate in this important volunteer effort, please email your RSVP to [DEPVolunteerDay@dep.nyc.gov](mailto:DEPVolunteerDay@dep.nyc.gov) and indicate which date(s) you can attend. If you have any questions, please call us at (718) 595-6599.

We look forward to hearing from you!

The Bluebelt Cleanup Team

### ('Training' Wheels Come off STWs... continued)



STWs, just as every STW that has joined the department over the last several decades, had to successfully complete a six week orientation program on a wide variety of topics covering safety, wastewater plant operations and maintenance. In fact, the 2012 class was so large that it required splitting the group in two and administering separate orientations to each group.

During the orientation, each day begins with a classroom training session that covers the topics that will be presented during the hands on skills training in the afternoon. The new STWs learn about personal protection equipment, right to know, fall protection, basic algebra, work zone safety, oxy-acetylene cutting, pipe soldering and fitting, working in confined spaces, rigging and moving heavy equipment with chains, slings, hoists and cranes, and the proper use of an aerial lift and fork lift. Further, each STW must pass a written exam on each topic before they can graduate.

"The STW Orientation Program is an excellent opportunity for us to present vital information to newly hired personnel that will keep them

safe and ensure that they have the skills necessary to more effectively perform their daily assignments, said BWT's Chief of Training and Development **Walter Dobkowski**. "I look forward to each orientation program because the new STWs arrive with a thirst for knowledge and each class challenges us to improve upon the way we convey this critical information."

The majority of the training takes place at the Red Hook, 26th Ward, and Wards Island Treatment Plants as they have mechanical shops for the hands on training and a graduation ceremony will take place this Friday at the Newtown Creek Plant.

"Sewage treatment workers perform a critical function in protecting the public health and ensuring the proper handling of New York City's wastewater," said BWT Deputy Commissioner **Vincent Sapienza**. "The workers handle a myriad of complex tasks on a daily basis and the comprehensive orientation program that Walter and his team have developed over the last twenty years ensures that each one of them is equipped with the knowledge and training to do their job in a safe and efficient manner."

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