

Home

Customer Services

- › [Ways to Pay Your Bill](#)
- › [Account Information](#)
- › [Customer Assistance](#)
- › [Service Line Protection Program](#)
- › [Water Rates](#)
- › [Property Managers & Trade Professionals](#)

Water Utilities

- › [Drinking Water](#)
- › [Wastewater](#)
- › [Stormwater](#)
- › [Harbor Water](#)
- › [Long Term Control Plan](#)

The Watershed

- › [Watershed Protection](#)
- › [Watershed Recreation](#)

Citywide Initiatives

- › [Regulatory Reform](#)
- › [Environmental Education](#)
- › [Conservation Programs](#)
- › [Air Pollution Control](#)
- › [Noise Codes & Complaints](#)

Business and Professionals

- › [Forms & Permits](#)
- › [Economic Development Unit](#)
- › [Doing Business with DEP](#)
- › [Asbestos Abatement](#)
- › [Construction, Demolition & Abatement](#)

About DEP

- › [Inside DEP](#)
- › [News](#)
- DEP Featured In...
- Stories from DEP
- Press Releases
- Public Notices
- Testimony & Public Comments



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CONTACT:

Chris Gilbride / Ted Timbers (718) 595-6600

More Information

NYC Department of Environmental Protection
Public Affairs
59-17 Junction Boulevard
19th Floor
Flushing, NY 11373
(718) 595-6600

Department of Environmental Protection Releases 2013 Sewer Performance Report

Data-driven, Proactive Approach to Operation and Maintenance of the Sewer System has Improved Performance and Reliability

Number of Sewer Backups Reduced by Nearly 40 Percent over Last Five Years

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland today released The State of the Sewers: 2013, which provides data showing that DEP's rigorous analysis, inspection, and cleaning programs has produced tangible improvements to the level of sewer service citywide. This year's report provides an overview of DEP's sewer maintenance programs, grease outreach initiatives, remote sewer monitoring pilot, and response to Hurricane Sandy. The report also includes citywide and borough by borough performance indicators that demonstrate DEP's commitment to customer service. The full report can be viewed on the DEP website [here](#).

"One of our primary focuses is protecting public health by maximizing the ability our sewer system to deliver waste and stormwater to our treatment plants and minimizing overflows into local waterways," said Commissioner Strickland. "Over the last decade we have invested billions of dollars in upgrades to our wastewater systems, and we have vastly improved our maintenance programs to ensure the infrastructure we have in place is working at full capacity."

As a result of improved maintenance, from 2009-2013:

- Confirmed sewer backups decreased by 38 percent
- Sewer segments with recurring backups decreased by 39 percent

- › [Capital Projects](#)
- › [Careers at DEP](#)
- › [Environmental Reviews](#)
- › [Interagency MOUs](#)
- › [A to Z Index](#)
- › [Contact Us](#)



- Dry weather backups decreased by 45 percent
- Miles of sewers cleaned annually increased from 388 to 764 – nearly 97 percent
- Response time to sewer backups decreased 21 percent, from 5.6 hours to 4.4 hours

In 2011, DEP created a Capacity, Management, Operations and Maintenance unit within the Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations. This unit employs advanced strategies to ensure that DEP resources are being targeted in areas that would benefit most from proactive interventions like increased cleaning. To target these areas, DEP enhanced its existing Geographic Information System (GIS) with digital, searchable maps of all sewer lines, manholes and other infrastructure, as well as enhanced data on customer service requests including cause, location and frequency to facilitate identification of trends and provide better service. Procedures and guidelines were then developed to institutionalize pre-existing field practices and crews were trained to follow the guidelines.

Over the past year, grease buildup accounted for more than 60 percent of confirmed sewer backups. In response, DEP began a public outreach campaign to inform New Yorkers about the hazards of improper grease disposal. The outreach campaign included the development of a public service announcement video, door to door canvassing in neighborhoods with recurring grease buildup in the sewers, and a year-long collaboration with the New York City Housing Authority to provide intensive educational outreach about the proper disposal of used cooking oil. As part of that pilot program, residents of one building in a Manhattan housing complex served as a control group and received DEP's standard educational materials, while residents of another building in the development participated in additional meetings, workshops, and events focused on grease. The sewer service lines from both buildings were inspected and cleaned prior to the program, and crews will re-inspect the lines at the pilot's conclusion to measure the relative improvement as a result of the intensive curriculum.

This year, DEP also announced the expansion of a pilot program to remotely monitor flows inside the sewer system, allowing crews to proactively respond to problems before they result in sewage backing up into homes and businesses, or onto streets. In 2012, DEP installed 21 remote sewer monitoring devices at strategic locations in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. This year, DEP installed 25 additional devices throughout the city and is preparing to install another 18 for a total of 64. The remote monitoring devices are installed inside manholes and measure the elevation of wastewater in the sewer. That information is transmitted wirelessly to DEP headquarters where it is tracked and analyzed. If the elevation of the wastewater approaches a level that could result in a surcharge or sewer backup, the sensor sends an alert and crews are dispatched to investigate and, if needed, fix the problem. Since the first sewer monitoring devices were installed last year, DEP crews have successfully responded to more than 120 device alerts, addressing issues that could have resulted in a surcharge or sewer back-ups.

DEP dispatches crews to investigate reported street leaks and has found that more than 75 percent are the result of problems with the private water and sewer lines. Property owners in New York City are responsible for the maintenance of their water and sewer service lines, which run from the city-owned mains and sewers under the street to individual buildings. To help property owners better manage the risks and high costs of service line breaks, the New York City Water Board issued a Request for Proposals from qualified providers for a Service Line Protection Program in 2011. In January of this year, DEP launched its Service Line Protection Program and, already, more than 100,000 homeowners in New York City have signed up. So far, the Program has saved these customers more than \$7 million in repair charges that would have otherwise been paid out of pocket. In 2013, American Water Resources, the

company that administers the Program, has performed more than 2,000 repairs across the five boroughs and more than 95 percent of customers surveyed are very satisfied with the service. The Program provides unlimited protection for covered repairs and basic restoration of the affected property. It also provides for an unlimited number of claims, 24/7 customer service, and quick response time by New York City licensed master plumbers who are pre-qualified to perform needed repairs. For the convenience of those who choose to participate, there are no claim forms to submit and no deductibles, and the protection program fees are itemized and included on each participating customer's regular DEP water and sewer bill.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, DEP received 925 sewer backup complaints from residents in Zones A and B, 6 percent of all sewer backup complaints received for the year. In response, DEP inspected more than 6,100 catch basins and cleaned more than 3,500. Crews spent weeks cleaning sand and debris out of sewers, flushing 37 miles of sewer citywide and inspecting 51 miles of sewer in the Rockaways alone. In total, DEP removed 450 cubic yards of debris from sewers. In addition, earlier this year, DEP released the NYC Wastewater Resiliency Plan, the nation's most detailed and comprehensive assessment of the risk climate change poses to a wastewater collection and treatment system. The groundbreaking study, initiated in 2011 and expanded after Hurricane Sandy, was based on an asset-by-asset analysis of the risks from storm surge under new flood maps at all 14 treatment plants and 58 pumping stations, representing more than \$1 billion in infrastructure. The analysis recommends \$315 million in cost-effective upgrades at these facilities to protect valuable equipment and minimize disruptions to critical services during future storms. The [NYC Wastewater Resiliency Plan](#) puts into action initiatives laid out in Mayor Bloomberg's [A Stronger, More Resilient New York](#).

DEP manages New York City's water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$14 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. This capital program is responsible for critical projects like City Water Tunnel No. 3; the Staten Island Bluebelt program, an ecologically-sound and cost-effective stormwater management system; the city's Watershed Protection Program, which protects sensitive lands upstate near the city's reservoirs in order to maintain their high water quality; and the installation of more than 820,000 Automated Meter Reading devices, which will allow customers to track their daily water use, more easily manage their accounts and be alerted to potential leaks on their properties. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/nycwater](https://www.facebook.com/nycwater), or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/nycwater.

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