



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**CITY UPDATES NEW YORKERS ON TORNADO RECOVERY EFFORTS**

*City Meets Federal Threshold for Public Assistance and Will Seek Major Disaster Declaration*

*All Reported Fallen Trees Have Been Removed From Homes, Cars and Roadways*

*18,000 Tons of Tree Debris Removed From Streets & Parks in First 2 Weeks, More Than in Average Year*

*City Urges Caution During Latest Round of Severe Weather*

Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Commissioner Joseph F. Bruno and Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe today joined Department of Design and Construction (DDC) Commissioner David Burney, Sanitation (DSNY) Chief of Cleaning Operations, Michael Bellew, Transportation (DOT) Assistant Commissioner for Emergency Response Nelson Castillo, Police (NYPD) Deputy Chief James Molloy, Fire (FDNY) Deputy Assistant Chief Robert Maynes, Buildings (DOB) Brooklyn Borough Commissioner Thomas Fariello, and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Deputy Commissioner for Operations Kathryn Garcia to update New Yorkers on the progress of the storm clean-up and announce that New York City has met the threshold to apply for federal reimbursement for storm expenses and will seek a federal Major Disaster Declaration.

“On September 16 the City suffered the worst storm damage we’ve seen in decades and since then more than a dozen City, county, state and federal agencies have undertaken a massive effort to clean-up debris and begin to make repairs to sidewalks, parks and playgrounds, said OEM Commissioner Joseph Bruno. “Today, we’re taking the next step in recovery by asking the federal government to declare major disasters in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island and help us pay for the damage caused to our public infrastructure.”

“Currently, the Parks Department has approximately 700 staffers, including mutual aid from nearby counties and the US Forest Service, helping with recovery. Thanks to their hard work and the swift coordination by the Office of Emergency Management of the city’s many agencies, New York City streets, parks and sidewalks are being cleaned up and repaired at record speeds,” said Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe. “This week’s recovery is focused on removing debris and downed trees from parks and pruning damaged tree limbs. I encourage New Yorkers to help out our efforts whether by volunteering through NYC Service, or donating to the Mayor’s Fund or at MillionTreesNYC.org.”

“The Department of Sanitation is proud to work closely with the other City agencies as we assist them in restoring neighborhoods that were severely affected by the battering storm which hit parts of Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island two weeks ago,” said First Deputy Commissioner Bernard J. Sullivan. “Sanitation removed 768 tons of fallen tree trunks, branches, and limbs which will be chipped while still providing essential refuse and recycling collection services. The immense amount of work completed clearly speaks to the commitment shown by all the agencies to return residents and their neighborhoods back to everyday life.”

“Our work has not let up since the storm touched down two weeks ago. More than 70 DOT crews have worked to clear and repair our roads and we will continue to bring resources to rebuild our streets and sidewalks until the job is done,” said DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan.

"This past weekend, our members resumed their efforts to help with the clean-up, working in rapid response units that helped tackle the trees and branches remaining since the storm," said Fire Commissioner Salvatore J. Cassano. "Our members helped clear 4,400 blocks in the affected areas. We're proud of our work with other city agencies to help the city recover from this difficult storm."

“Engineers and inspectors from the Department of Buildings have responded to more than 170 locations to assess the structural stability of buildings impacted by last week’s storm,” said Buildings Commissioner LiMandri. “These inspections are still ongoing, and the Department will continue to monitor buildings that sustained the most severe damage to ensure they are properly repaired. New Yorkers who are concerned about the conditions of any building should call 311 so we can respond.”

### **Storm Impact:**

On Thursday, September 16, a strong evening storm produced two tornadoes, one in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and the other near Flushing and Bayside in Queens. The storm also produced a macroburst downdraft more than a mile wide, and with winds in excess of 125 miles per hour. Thousands of trees were damaged or destroyed and hundreds of homes and businesses were also impacted. In addition, 45,000 people lost electricity, and many others were left without telephone, television and internet services.

Since the storm, more than 9,000 New Yorkers have called 311 to report tree damage. More than 580 have also called 311 to complete a damage assessment survey to report losses to their homes or businesses. The City’s 311 Damage Assessment Tool is used to help assess the extent of the damage to homes and businesses and to assign federal inspectors working to determine if the City qualifies for federal disaster aid. Since the storm, DOB has conducted over 170 inspections and issued 37 vacate orders due to storm damage. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Federal Small Business Administration (SBA) State Office of Emergency Management (NYS OEM) have inspected damage at more than 600 privately owned locations and 40 public facilities.

### **Major Disaster Declaration:**

On Wednesday, September 22, FEMA, SBA, and NYS OEM began conducting a preliminary damage assessment to determine if the City qualifies for federal disaster aid through the

Stafford Act. FEMA's initial assessment shows that storm damage and clean-up efforts will cost more than \$24.5 million, the federal threshold needed for New York State to apply for a Major Disaster Declaration. Each county must also meet a separate cost threshold that is determined by population. FEMA's preliminary assessment also shows that damage and clean-up will exceed the thresholds of \$7.2 million in Queens County, \$7.9 million in Kings County, and \$1.4 million in Richmond County, making all three counties eligible to apply for public assistance.

New York City has asked Governor Paterson to request a Major Disaster Declaration from President Obama. If the President issues a Major Disaster Declaration for Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, FEMA would provide federal reimbursement to public agencies and eligible not-for-profits for a large percentage of the cost of the clean-up and repairs to damaged sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, and other public facilities and infrastructure.

However, a Major Disaster Declaration, alone does not make uninsured individuals or small businesses eligible for federal aid. In addition to the thresholds for public assistance described above, FEMA and SBA use separate criteria to determine if individuals and small businesses who suffered uninsured losses are eligible for federal aid or low interest loans. FEMA has *not yet* determined whether New York City has met the criteria for individual assistance.

### **Response and Recovery Strategy:**

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the City focused on threats to people's safety, including reports of live power lines in the street and trees blocking access to emergency vehicles. By Saturday morning, major roadways were cleared and 95% of Con Ed customers who lost power had their electricity restored. By Wednesday, last week, all roads were cleared and the City's focus shifted to cutting fallen trees and hanging limbs, removing debris, and repairing sidewalk damage caused by City owned trees. As many as 1,200 people and 400 pieces of equipment have been working daily to inspect the damage and remove debris, including hundreds of personnel assigned through mutual aid agreements from Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties, as well as the New York State Department of Transportation, New York State Parks Department, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the Army National Guard, and the US Forest Service. The City has also called upon dozens of volunteers from NYC Service and OEM's Community Emergency Response Teams to assist in the recovery.

The City's Emergency Operations Center at OEM Headquarters remains open to coordinate the efforts of the city, state, county and federal agencies responding to the storm damage. Those agencies include: DPR, DSNY, DDC, NYC DOT, FDNY, NYPD, DOB, DEP, New York State Office of Emergency Management, Army National Guard, and FEMA. Updates on the City's current objectives include:

- **Fallen Trees and Hanging Limbs** – The City has received more than 9,000 calls about damage to trees since the storm hit, including more than 3,500 reports of trees down and nearly 1,700 reports of hanging limbs. **Every report of trees on houses, cars, and streets has been closed.** The NYPD's Emergency Service Unit responded to nearly 300 reports of downed trees and the FDNY's Rapid Response Teams and other units helped clear 4,400 city blocks of debris from downed trees and limbs. DPR has also had as many as 700 people working each day to remove tree and limb debris. However, the City continues to remove

debris and respond to reports of hanging limbs. With high winds and heavy rain expected Thursday and Friday, the City is encouraging New Yorkers to take extra precaution to avoid hanging limbs and continue to report them to 311.

- **Debris Removal** – Since the storm, the City has removed more than 18,000 tons of tree debris from streets and parks and continues to remove more than 1,300 tons each day. In an average year DPR removes only 13,000 tons of tree debris. Tree debris is being chipped at four sites around the city: Cunningham Park, College Point and Flushing Meadow Park, in Queens, and a Waste Management facility in Brooklyn. DSNY has sent more than 1,400 employees and nearly 900 collection trucks, dump trucks, front end loaders and mechanical brooms to damaged areas. DPR, DOT, DEP have also sent hundreds of crews to help remove debris.
- **Sidewalk Repairs** – DDC estimates that nearly 1,200 sidewalks were damaged during the storm. DDC has inspected more than 400 sidewalks and issued work orders for more than 300 of them. A dozen locations have already been repaired and DDC has enlisted help from the National Guard, DOT and NYC Scout crews to help inspect sidewalks. DDC and DOT will continue to create drawings of the damage and send them to contractors who have been hired to help repair sidewalks as quickly as possible. Homeowners will not be held responsible for any sidewalk damaged by a City owned tree.

### **Private Tree Removal Service Improvement**

In an effort to make it easier for residents to get trees in their neighborhood cleared, DPR has new information on its website. On the agency’s homepage, under “features,” Parks has a new form that allows residents affected by the storm to work with approved private contractors to remove or prune trees. Parks has also provided the names and phone numbers of approved tree care specialists. Homeowners will be responsible for paying the bill and can apply for reimbursement from the Comptroller’s Office. Information about reimbursements can be found at the Comptroller’s website under “filing claims” at [www.comptroller.nyc.gov](http://www.comptroller.nyc.gov) or by calling 311. For more information on private tree removal visit [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks) or call 311.

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