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Contact: Ian Michaels (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

DEP Starts Enhanced Beach Protection Program For Summer

Program Includes Increased Shoreline Surveillance and Free Pump-Out Stations for Boat Waste

Commissioner Christopher O. Ward of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today that the DEP has begun its Enhanced Beach Protection Program for the summer. The Program began May 15 will run through the summer months to September 30, the traditional end of the region's beach and boating season.

Under the Program each summer since 1997, DEP's Marine Sciences unit increases its monitoring of the harbor for various water quality indicators such as fecal coliform and dissolved oxygen levels. DEP also increases surveillance of the City's shorelines for illegal dumping from the City's thousands of sewage outfalls. Preventive maintenance of sewage pumping stations and regulators is increased, as are efforts to monitor the impact of the sewage overflows that occur throughout the City after rainstorms.

As an added feature to help protect harbor water quality, the DEP also operates free pump-out stations where boat owners can legally dispose of their onboard septic waste, rather than releasing it into the harbor. This year the DEP has seven pump-out stations throughout the five boroughs operating since May 1 during daylight hours. Another two stations are available that are not funded by the DEP.

"Thanks to the City's investment in sewage treatment plants and its stronger enforcement of environmental regulations, pollution levels in New York Harbor have decreased by 98 percent over the last 25 years," said Commissioner Ward. "That has enabled us to take greater advantage of the Harbor and to open more beaches to the public for swimming.

"The Enhanced Beach Protection Program adds an extra level of protection during the hottest summer months, when the most people will be on or in the water. In the past, the Program has been successful in minimizing beach closures and reducing the amount of sewage that flows into the Harbor untreated," continued Ward.

As part of the Program, 66 strategic points in the City's

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sewer system have had remote monitoring equipment installed to alert the DEP to raw sewage discharges, including 25 pumping stations and 41 sewer regulators located near beaches. The systems are monitored around-the-clock and crews can be dispatched to respond to any emergencies.

Boat owners wishing to use the DEP's free pump-out facilities must dock at a floating pier, open a valve on a remote control pumping stand, and use a flexible hose to drain the boat's waste tank. Waste is suctioned through the hose from the remote station to tanks, and from there flows to one of the City's 14 sewage treatment plants. The convenience and cost effectiveness of these modern pumping stations reduces the dumping of sewage by marine vessels and provides a valuable service to the area's boaters.

DEP's seven free pump-out stations are located throughout the five boroughs at: Dyckman Marina (Hudson River, Manhattan), World's Fair Marina (Flushing Bay, Queens), Bayside Marina (Little Neck Bay, Queens), Locust Point Marina (Throgs Neck, Bronx), Hudson River Yacht Club (Paerdegat Basin, Brooklyn), Coney Island Water Pollution Control Plant (Shellbank Creek, Brooklyn), and Lemon Creek Mariner's Association (Princess Bay, Staten Island).

In addition, City of New York/Parks & Recreation operates a free pump-out station at the 79 th Street Marina in Manhattan. The National Parks Service also has one at Great Kills Marina in Staten Island .

For the last 93 years, the City has issued an annual Harbor Water Quality Report. The 2002 Report (issued in summer 2003) notes that fecal coliform levels – an indicator of the presence of raw or partially treated sewage and one of the most important water quality indicators – dropped by over 98 percent in the Inner Harbor and Upper East River since the early 1970s. The trend coincides with upgrades to the four sewage treatment plants that serve those areas: Bowery Bay , Tallman Island , Hunts Point and Wards Island . Other reasons for improvements include better monitoring and control of industrial discharges and the abatement of illegal dumping into the sewer system.

Another pollution control program listed in the 2002 Report restricts the discharge of certain types of industrial waste into the sewer system. Over the last 13 years, the number of firms regulated under this program has increased from 1,000 to 30,000, with no increase in DEP staff. During that time, heavy metals in wastewater has dropped from 7,800 lbs. to 2,800 lbs. per day citywide. Heavy industry now accounts for less than one percent of the metals in untreated sewage citywide.

In 1998, the DEP initiated a program to eliminate the discharge of untreated sewage into the Harbor during dry weather. This program involved a detailed evaluation of the City's entire 425 miles of shoreline and over 3,000 sewer outfalls. The initial survey found that there was over 3 million gallons a day of untreated sewage being dumped into the Harbor daily. To date, the DEP has eliminated 96 percent of these discharges.

Since 1997, at the beginning of the Enhanced Beach Protection Program, 92 sewage pumping stations throughout the City have had computerized monitoring equipment installed. As a result, the total amount of untreated sewage bypassed from pump stations and regulators during the 2002 season was just 0.0002 percent

of total dry weather flow, a 97 percent decrease from 1997.

For more information on harbor water quality, sewage treatment and the efforts of the DEP to monitor water quality throughout the Harbor, see the DEP's Web site at www.nyc.gov/dep.