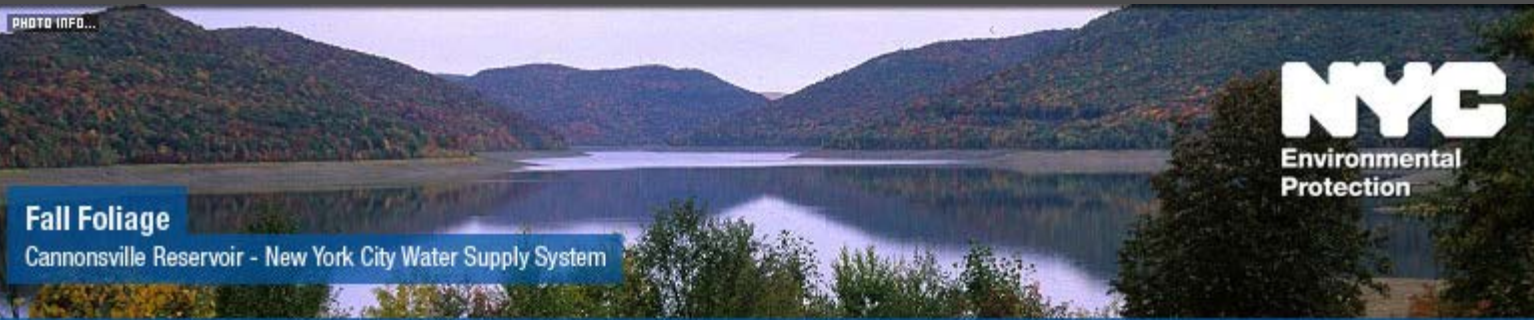




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DEP Holds 24th Annual Operations Challenge

Teams of Wastewater Treatment Workers Compete to Demonstrate Their Skills and Preparedness to Operate New York City's 14 Wastewater Treatment Plants

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway today kicked off the 24th Annual Operations Challenge competition, a test of skill and speed for teams of sewage treatment workers who compete in timed events for the chance to represent DEP at the New York State and national competitions that take place later this year. Four DEP teams will compete in various tasks, including fixing a pipe, repairing a pump, and rescuing an injured employee. The two winning teams will represent New York City at the State competition to be held in May at Lake George. This year's morning-long event was held at the Owls Head Wastewater Treatment Plant in Brooklyn, and is sponsored by DEP and the Water Environment Federation.

"Our harbor waters are healthier than they have been at any time in the last 100 years, thanks in large part to the hard work and dedication of nearly 1,900 DEP employees who work at our wastewater treatment plants and collections facilities," said Commissioner Holloway. "This friendly competition showcases the skills and talent of our workforce, who perform highly specialized tasks each day that keep our city running and our environment safe. We look forward to displaying our skills at the State competition in May, and then it's on to Los Angeles, where we intend to compete for the national title."

This year's four competing teams — the Sludge Fellas, the Tide Surfers, the Unknowns, and the Turtle Surfers — hail from the Owls Head, Tallman Island and North River wastewater treatment plants. Each team will compete in five timed events, including:

- ▶ *Collections:* Teams respond to a leaking pipe and repair it while it remains in service.
- ▶ *Water Quality Testing:* Teams perform tests to determine the pollution level in water to see if it meets discharge standards.
- ▶ *Maintenance:* Contestants remove submersible

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equipment, make the necessary repairs and return it to service.

- ▶ *Waste Treatment Process:* Teams answer multiple choice questions to demonstrate their knowledge of the wastewater treatment process.
- ▶ *Worker Safety:* Teams rescue a dummy in a confined space while checking air quality using safety devices and perform CPR.

The Operations Challenge is an excellent opportunity to showcase safety and training skills while recognizing the work of wastewater treatment operators. The two highest scoring teams will go on to compete in the statewide competition in May. From there, winners of the statewide contest will participate in a national competition in Los Angeles. The Operations Challenge was developed by the Water Environment Federation, the largest professional organization representing the wastewater treatment industry. The event at the Owls Head Wastewater Treatment Plant is sponsored by a local chapter of the organization in conjunction with DEP, which has participated in the Operations Challenge since 1987. A team from DEP has made it to the national competition for 15 straight years.

Each day, DEP treats 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater. Since 2002, the City has invested nearly \$7.5 billion to upgrade its 14 wastewater treatment plants. Because of these investments, DEP has achieved a number of milestones recently: reaching Clean Water Act secondary treatment standards for the first time ever — three years ahead of schedule; and agreeing to a historic nitrogen-reduction program with the State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Today, New York Harbor water quality is at its best in the last 100 years since the city began collecting water quality data to monitor the ecological health of the harbor. To further improve the quality of the harbor, Mayor Bloomberg announced the Green Infrastructure Plan in 2010, which will cut combined sewer overflows by 40% over the next 20 years and cost \$2.4 billion less than a more traditional approach of tanks and tunnels. Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and other structural elements to absorb and evaporate water and to mimic natural areas and hydrologic cycles. These types of projects are a key component of PlaNYC, New York City's sustainability blueprint, because they also shade and cool the city, improve air quality, and increase property values.

DEP manages the city's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. New York City's water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, and comprises 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 7,400 miles of sewer lines take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/dep or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nycwater.

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