

Are You Up to the Challenge?



Members of the North River Wastewater Treatment Plant's Harlem Pump Trotters rush to repair a leaking pipe while it remains in service

Last week DEP hosted the 26th annual Operations Challenge competition in which wastewater treatment plant operators compete to showcase the expertise and skills required to operate and maintain New York City's 14 wastewater treatment plants. After competing in five events that represent a cross section of essential wastewater treatment operations, the two winning

teams will move on to compete at the statewide competition in June. This year's morning-long event was held at the Owls Head Wastewater Treatment Plant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and is sponsored by DEP and the Water Environment Federation.

This year's five competing teams—The Harlem Pumptrotters, the Cy-

(Continued on reverse side)

Spotlight on Safety

Propane Hazards

With warmer weather comes barbecue season and one of the most popular fuels used in barbecuing is propane gas. However, propane is not just for domestic use. DEP also uses propane at some of its facilities for central heating, forklift operations and in asphalt melters.

Propane can be hazardous. Therefore facilities should establish a propane tank management system to control or minimize propane leaks and to prevent a fire or explosion. Below are some basic safety facts that you should be aware of when encountering propane tanks in the workplace setting.

- Since propane is naturally colorless and odorless, it is required to be odorized so that people can easily smell the gas in case of a leak

- Tanks of all sizes must be managed and disposed of properly by licensed recyclers
- Valves or hardware can never be removed or tampered with except by properly trained individuals
- Overfill prevention devices (OPD)/safety valves are required by national fire safety codes
- Propane tanks must be stored outside and in a secure area. The area must also have appropriate signage

For additional information on propane tank management refer to the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA) guide on [propane cylinder overfill prevention devices \(OPD\)](#).

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

Last night I presented our proposed water rate for next fiscal year in Staten Island, the first of five public hearings being held in each borough this week. The water rate hearings are an important opportunity to speak directly to the public in order to explain how and why we are spending their money to build projects, operate the system, provide critical services every day, and respond to emergencies. We make the point that DEP's investments ensure that current and future generations of New Yorkers have a healthy drinking water supply and a clean environment. We also explain what we are doing with the public's money and the efforts we are taking to be good fiscal stewards.

Earlier this month we proposed a 5.6 percent increase in the water rate to the New York City Water Board, the lowest increase in nearly a decade and the fourth year in a row the rate has come in significantly below the previous year's projection. We are able to propose rates lower than projected because of the steps we have taken to lower costs, improvements we have made in collections and customer service through the Automated Meter Reader (AMR) program, regulatory and policy advances that have helped us better control capital costs, and the current low interest environment which has allowed us to lower our borrowing costs.

As part of *Strategy 2011-2014* we set a goal of being the most cost effective water utility in the nation, and across DEP we have found smart ways to provide world class services at the best cost to our ratepayers. Next year alone, we are paying for new programs and operations through cuts in this year's costs including through many Operational Excellence initiatives. Just the 15 OpX initiatives we have already implemented, including renegotiating chemical costs and consolidating our fleet, are projected to save \$15.7 million dollars each year and we expect



that number to be even higher by the end of this year.

In addition to our efforts to cut costs, the AMR and meter replacement programs have resulted in better than projected revenues and have been a big win for our customers. Since 2011, AMRs have helped reduce estimated bills by more than 62 percent, and, since we began installing AMRs, billing disputes are down 16 percent. AMRs have also saved our customers \$31 million through the Leak Notification Program.

On the regulatory front, DEP has regained more control over our capital budget, allowing us to bid under more favorable market conditions and to prioritize non-mandatory but important projects like sewer extension and flood control. From 2002 through 2012, 65 percent of DEP's capital spending was for unfunded federal and state mandates. This includes capital spending on projects like the \$3.2 billion Croton Water Filtration Plant and the \$1.6 billion Ultraviolet Disinfection Facility. DEP has been successfully working with regulators to reduce future mandates, and in the next 10-year Capital Improvement Plan, the percentage of mandated projects will fall to 18 percent.

Finally, we have taken advantage of current low interest rates to refinance more than \$5 billion of higher-cost debt that, in the long run, will save our ratepayers more than \$700 million.

If you are interested in seeing my complete rate presentation a copy is available on our website here.

Focus on the Field



During his 35 years with DEP, Owl's Head Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent **Bill Grandner** has worked at a number of the department's wastewater treatment facilities. His first assignment though, was right where he is today, at Owls Head. He started as a Sewage Treatment Worker in the late 1970's after working as an electrician in the construction industry. Grandner then served at the Red Hook Wastewater Treatment Plant, as a Senior Sewage Treatment Worker and later a Stationary Engineer. He was later promoted to Deputy Superintendent at Newtown Creek before returning to Owls Head 11 years ago. Grandner is responsible for supervising dozens of workers who treat as much as 240 million gallons of wastewater each day in wet weather. "This is a round the clock operation, and Bill makes it happen 24/7, 365," said Deputy Commissioner **Vincent Sapienza**.

Grandner thinks most New Yorkers do not realize what it takes DEP to treat more than a billion gallons of wastewater each day. "Operating a wastewater treatment plant is like operating a small city," he said.

Since 2002, DEP has invested more than \$10 billion in upgrades

at the City's 14 wastewater treatment plants and, as a result, New York's waterways are cleaner than they have been in a century. At Owl's Head, Grandner played a key role in a series of upgrades to the plant that have already significantly cut greenhouse gas emissions and allow plant operators to use digester gas created during the treatment process to supplement the plant's energy needs. Using digester gas to power some of the plant's systems eases pressure on the electrical grid, which is particularly important during the hottest months of the year.

Owl's Head was also the first plant to test several *OpX* initiatives. Grandner and the team at Owl's Head successfully carried out a number of *OpX* recommendations that have improved process controls and maintenance. "Bill loves a good challenge," Sapeinza said. "Thanks to his dedication, Owl's Head has been a real proving ground for several major *OpX* initiatives."

Grandner recently helped coordinate the 26th annual Operations Challenge competition in which wastewater treatment plant operators compete to showcase the expertise and skills required to operate and maintain New York City's 14 wastewater treatment plant. "I have been involved with Operations Challenge for 30 years and have been in a coordination role for more than 25," he said. "The Operations Challenge has given me the opportunity and the pleasure to travel around New York State and around the country with our teams representing DEP and the New York Water Environmental Association."

During his spare time, Grandner stays active traveling and enjoying quality time with his grandchildren.

Attention Engineering Interns

Great News! In the past, provisional Engineering Interns and Engineering Intern candidates seeking employment with DEP, who received their engineering Bachelor's degree outside of the one year time period posted on exam notices, were virtually locked out from taking these exams with no chance of ever becoming permanent Engineering Interns—until now. Human Resources reached out to DCAS and they have now expanded the eligibility time period (for having received an engineering degree) from one year to three and a half years.

Online filing for Engineering Intern exams will run from May 1, 2013 through May 21, 2013 and DEP's provisional Engineering Interns who received engineering degrees between December 1, 2009 and June 30, 2013 will have the opportunity to file and take these exams—a win for provisional Engineering Interns, DEP and the City. Any questions, please contact either your Bureau Administrator or DEP Human Resources at (718) 595-3377.

(Are You Up to the Challenge?... continued)

clones, the Sluice Gators, the Warriors, and the Hammers hail from the North River, Coney Island, Jamaica, 26th Ward, and Hunts Point wastewater treatment plants. Each team competed in three timed events, including:

Collections: Teams responded to a leaking pipe and repaired it while it remained in service.

Maintenance: Contestants removed damaged submersible pumps, made the necessary repairs and returned them to service.

Worker Safety: Teams competed in a timed confined space rescue while checking air quality using safety devices and performing CPR.

In addition, this year's competition included two additional events which the teams completed earlier in the week.

Water Quality Testing: Teams performed tests to determine pollution levels in water to see if it met discharge standards.

Waste Treatment Process: Teams answered multiple choice questions to demonstrate their knowledge of the wastewater treatment process.



Jamaica's Sluice Gators hoist a damaged submersible pump before making the necessary repairs and return it to service.

The two highest scoring teams will go on to compete in the statewide competition in Syracuse in June. From there, winners of the statewide contest will participate in the international competition in Chicago, in October.

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 international competition for 16 straight years.

Brown Bag



Join us this Thursday, May 2, from noon to 1pm for another installment of the DEP Experience, the departments brown bag presentation series. This month, Deputy Commissioner for Water Supply **Paul Rush** will discuss the history of New York City's drinking water and modern day water supply operations. Deputy Commissioner Rush will also highlight some of DEP's newest and largest infrastructure projects, including the Croton Filtration and Ultraviolet Disinfection Plants. The presentation

will take place in the 3rd floor cafeteria at Lefrak and be broadcast to Valhalla, Kingston and Grahamsville.

Milestones

Congratulations to the following employees on 30 or more years of service: **Cesar Garcia**, BWSO, 38 years; **Gerard Cox**, BEDC, 31 years; **Edwin Tardy**, BWSO, 31 years; **Fayek Habib**, BEDC, 30 years. Congratulations to **Michael Williams** of BWS and his wife **Melanie** on the birth of their son, **Ian Gerald Williams**, on February 27, 2013. All are doing well.

We welcome your feedback! To submit an announcement or suggestion, please email us at: newsletter@dep.nyc.gov