

They're G-r-r-r-ate! Catch Basin Crews Storm City's Drains

For most New Yorkers, it's just another feature of the urban landscape—barely acknowledged until a ring or an iPhone is dropped down the ominous metal grate. While catch basins may not be the most glamorous piece of infrastructure, they perform a critical role in ensuring the health, safety, and economic vitality of New York City.



A catch basin is a type of storm drain located adjacent to a curb that collects rainwater from the street and transports it either to one of DEP's 14 wastewater treatment plants (for combined sewers) or directly into a waterbody (for stormwater sewers). The catch basin is typically covered by a metal grate, which prevents large objects from falling in. Catch basins function primarily as a draining mechanism during heavy storms to prevent flooding and allow rainwater to flow off of the city's impermeable streets and sidewalks. With more than 144,000 catch basins, some of them are bound to get clogged once in a while.

To ensure clogged catch basins are a rare occurrence, BWSO's field operations unit carries out a comprehensive catch basin inspection program which ensures that each of the catch basins is inspected at least once every three years. BWSO also responds to 311 complaints regarding clogged catch basins and street flooding, and a special rain patrol is also sent out during heavy storms to focus on clearing debris off the top of catch basins. When a weather event is forecast, crews also preinspect areas prone to flooding to ensure infrastructure is operating properly.

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Spotlight on Safety

Work Zone Awareness Week: Safer Work Zones for Everyone

National Work Zone Awareness Week was April 4–8. Roadway work zones are hazardous for motorists and workers. There are 40,000 injuries and 1,000 fatalities each year as a result of accidents within traffic work zones. Through DEP's Traffic Work Zone Safety program the agency vigorously aims to protect its workers from the danger associated with traffic work zones.

EHS divisions within DEP's operations bureaus are responsible for creating guidelines and SOPs

that are designed to enhance the safety of employees as they perform their tasks in ongoing traffic. Employees are trained thoroughly on the importance of the use of signs to alert motorists of upcoming work zones as well as cones and traffic control barrels that are used to set up a work zone. EHS staff will work with field operations personnel on any occasion where additional guidance is sought. To read the full article, please click here [🔗](#).

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 week was a big one for Green Infrastructure, and our plan to use it as a sustainable, affordable way to improve water quality, and New Yorkers' overall quality of life. On Friday, I participated in a panel on the subject as part of a 40-day celebration of EPA's 40th anniversary sponsored by EPA at Columbia University's Earth Institute. The panel included great presentations from **Suzanna Randall**, Green Infrastructure Coordinator for the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation and **Matt Millea**, Deputy County Executive for Onondaga County, that highlighted the unique water quality challenges different communities face across New York State. As the densest urban environment in the country, New York City certainly faces unique challenges: 72% of the city's surface area is impervious, and generates an enormous amount of stormwater runoff when it rains. Capturing as much of that flow as possible before it enters and potentially overwhelms our combined sewer system is at the heart of the NYC Green Infrastructure Plan, and I explained that we are committing \$1.5 billion over the next 20 years to do it. Our goal is to slash combined sewer overflows (CSOs), which can dump untreated wastewater into our waterways, by 40% by 2030. To ensure that green infrastructure becomes a permanent part of the City's capital design process, **Deputy Mayor Goldsmith** has convened a Green Infrastructure Taskforce

of city agencies that include the Departments of Transportation, Design and Construction, Parks and Recreation, and other stakeholders; right now the task force is actively evaluating projects that we can fast-track and get in the ground as early as this year.

In addition to public infrastructure projects, DEP is trying to encourage innovation at the community level, where comparatively small green infrastructure investments can make a big impact. Last Tuesday City Council Member **Brad Lander** and I hosted a community meeting in Gowanus to talk about the green infrastructure plan, and the community grant program that is underway [🔗](#). We had a strong turnout, and Council Member Lander challenged attendees to become the most active and committed neighborhood to partner with DEP and the City on the plan. Also on the local front, last Saturday, we launched the Rain Barrel Giveaway Program, through which we'll distribute 1,000 55-gallon rain barrels to homeowners. These 1,000 barrels can prevent a total of 55,000 gallons of water from entering our sewer system each time it rains; and homeowners can use stored rain water to water their lawns—reducing their gardening bills during the hot summer months. The giveaway event was in Brooklyn (see a TV clip here [🔗](#)), and we have upcoming giveaways in Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island (see the schedule here [🔗](#)).

Focus on the Field



At 6:30 in the morning many New Yorkers are taking showers, brushing their teeth, and making breakfast before work. **Rhadames Soto**, Construction Laborer in the Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations, is already on the job and making it possible for us to do all of our daily tasks that involve turning the tap.

During the average day, Rhadames flushes the sewers and cleans some of the city's 144,000 catch basins that keep the sewer system operating to its fullest capacity. Clean catch basins also help keep litter out of the sewers and New York City's surrounding waters—one of the initiatives in DEP's strategic plan. Rhadames mostly works with one partner, but the nature of his job puts him in constant contact with other DEP

employees and the public. Rhadames has retrieved items ranging from cell phones to keys, including things as precious as wedding rings. Less valuable objects that find their way into catch basins include clothes, household items, and plenty of garbage. The recent recovery of one Queens resident's iPhone even earned him the title "a municipal Saint Anthony"—the patron of recovering lost things. 📱 But Rhadames is more modest about his contribution: he says, "I enjoy helping other people. There are lots of people who work hard and help every day. We're trying to do the best for DEP and do the right thing."

Rhadames attributes his ability to do his job well to his knowledge of Queens and Brooklyn, but he also draws from 23 years of experience at DEP. He previously worked in construction, repaired hydrants, and did maintenance on the water and sewer system, and he has worked out of more than one yard. His career has been equally varied: before DEP, Rhadames worked with the elderly and played professional baseball. In his free time, he teaches people about the bible and is committed to his church.

Did You Know – Earth Day Extra!

...if you reduce your time in the shower by five minutes, you can save 25 gallons of water a day?

...If you load the dishwasher without rinsing dirty dishes you can save 20 gallons of water per dishwasher load?

...adding native plants to your garden will save you money since they need less water and fertilizer?

...you shouldn't water or fertilize your garden if rain is coming? Water will go to waste and fertilizer will travel down storm drains, polluting waterways.

2011 Operations Challenge

Each year, the Water Environment Federation sponsors an Operations Challenge, where teams of wastewater operators from around the country demonstrate their skills in timed events. On April 26, three teams of DEP employees will compete against each other at the Owls Head plant, performing tasks such as fixing a pipe, repairing a pump, and rescuing an injured employee. A "Jeopardy-style" test of knowledge will later be held on May 3 at a New York Water Environment sponsored meeting. The winning team will be New York City's representative in the statewide challenge this May, and hopefully continue on to the national event this October in Los Angeles. Best of luck to our North River, Tallman Island and Owls Head teams.

Kudos Corner



The Bureau of Police and Security recently participated in a successful operational drill as part of the federally funded "Securing the Cities" (STC) program. The focus of the five-day drill, which was coordinated by the NYPD and included 13 major law enforcement partners, was on measuring the region's ability to thwart a radiological attack on the city.

(They're G-r-r-r-rate! Catch Basin Crews Storm City's Drains... continued)

During a scheduled inspection, BWSO staff examines the surrounding concrete, sidewalk, and the iron grate itself to ensure that there are no structural issues. Next, they measure the accumulation of debris in the catch basin to determine if cleaning is required. Anytime the level of debris in a catch basin comes within 18 inches of the outlet to the sewer system, a cleaning is required. To clean the catch basin, BWSO uses a truck mounted crane, which first lifts the metal grate off of the catch basin and then uses a clamshell bucket to remove the debris.

Repairs for the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, his crews have found raccoons, swans, and baby ducks living in catch basins. His crew was even called on recently to rescue a small kitten that had fallen through the metal grate and down into the catch basin. BWSO also occasionally receives calls from the NYPD to assist in a weapon search when it is believed that a suspect dumped a gun or knife into a catch basin.

Although sewer maintenance crews are happy to help with the rescue of a kitten or even a lost iPhone, their primary responsibility is always to ensure the overall integrity of the sewer system. And catch basin cleaning remains a critical sewer maintenance activity. **Rick Nelson**, the Acting Chief of Maintenance and Repairs for Brooklyn and Queens, points out that by reducing the likelihood of flooding, catch basin cleaning "ensures the health, security, and well-being of the general public." So the next time you're walking down the street, take a moment to notice the catch basins beneath your feet and the thousands of miles of connecting sewers that make it possible to live comfortably in New York City.



When you inspect so many catch basins each year, you're bound to make some unexpected discoveries. According to **Dennis Delaney**, Chief of Maintenance and

Milestones

Congratulations to **Susan Mathys**, BWS, on 40 years of service, and **Cassandra Kennedy**, BHRA, on 35 years of service.

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