



**Delaware River Basin Commission**

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**Carol R. Collier**

Executive Director

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March 29, 2013

James T. McDermott Jr.  
Executive Director  
Philadelphia Regional Port Authority  
3460 N. Delaware Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19134

Dear Mr. McDermott:

Through our coordination with state and local stakeholders, we've been informed of the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority's intention to withdraw local funding support from the NOAA PORTS system in the Delaware Estuary, leading ultimately to the elimination of eight PORTS stations. We believe this course of action will result in increased risk to human health and the environment from maritime accidents, flood damage, and water quality events. We urge you to reconsider withdrawal of local funding.

In addition to its maritime safety benefits, the NOAA PORTS system in the Delaware Estuary is used widely in efforts ranging from flood damage reduction, to emergency response, to management of water quality and drinking water resources. I've enclosed with this letter a brief description of the benefits to the region provided by the NOAA PORTS system.

I would welcome the opportunity to work cooperatively with you to identify sustainable funding support for this important regional asset. The benefits of the existing system are too important to be lost.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol R. Collier". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carol R. Collier  
Executive Director

Enclosure

c: DRBC Commissioners

## The Need for NOAA PORTS Stations in the Delaware Estuary

- The Final Report of the Delaware River and Bay Oil Spill Advisory Committee, published in December 2010 highlighted the importance of the NOAA PORTS system to preventing maritime accidents and associated pollution releases. In fact, Recommendation 14 of that report was to “fund the upgrade, continued operation, and maintenance of” the PORTS system. That report indicates that PORTS has the potential to prevent shipping accidents and subsequent environmental damage and save millions of dollars in response, restoration, and damage claims. The Oil Spill Advisory Committee was formed after the Athos 1 oil spill in 2004 to identify strategies for reducing oil spill incidents and impacts in the Delaware Estuary. The report is available at [http://www.state.nj.us/drbc/library/documents/DRBOSAC\\_final-report122010.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/drbc/library/documents/DRBOSAC_final-report122010.pdf)
- NOAA PORTS stations in the upper Delaware Estuary were critical to monitoring the impact of Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and Superstorm Sandy on tidal flooding in the Delaware Estuary. The geomorphology of the estuary results in an amplified tidal range in the upper portion of the estuary. Monitoring via the PORTS system is critical to the protection of human health and safety.
- Similarly, the NOAA PORTS system is a key component in the efforts of DRBC’s Flood Advisory Committee to develop a coastal storm-surge inundation and forecast system for the Delaware Bay and tidal Delaware River, in cooperation with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the states of New Jersey, and Delaware, NOAA National Weather Service, and the US Geological Survey. These efforts would implement a recommendation of the Delaware River Basin Interstate Flood Mitigation Task Force Action Agenda, published in July 2007.
- DRBC’s continuous real-time flow and transport model draws on data from the PORTS system to simulate movement of contaminants during spill events to protect drinking water intakes. Immediately after the recent vinyl chloride release near Paulsboro, NJ, DRBC simulated the plume and coordinated with drinking water intakes in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We subsequently added Mantua Creek segmentation to the model, in coordination with NOAA’s Emergency Response Division, and used the PORTS water level data from Marcus Hook and Newbold, as well as Philadelphia, to recalibrate the model.
- NOAA PORTS data is integral to the computation of the location of the salt line (<http://www.state.nj.us/drbc/hydrological/river/salt/>) in the estuary, and subsequent reservoir releases to limit its upstream migration.
- Docket holders and DRBC staff routinely use PORTS data for dilution studies to evaluate acute effluent impacts on the Delaware Estuary.
- NOAA PORTS temperature and conductivity data sets are evaluated in the Delaware River and Bay Water Quality Assessment Report (<http://www.state.nj.us/drbc/quality/reports/quality/index.html>) to determine if surface water quality standards are being met. In addition, PORTS tidal elevation data is considered in both the planning and reconciliation of water quality monitoring events.
- Finally, DRBC is in the initial phase of developing estuary hydrodynamic and eutrophication models, to support development of nutrient criteria. The loss of tidal elevation data from Newbold, Burlington, Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, Marcus Hook, Delaware City, Ship John Shoal, Brandywine Shoal Light, and Brown Shoal Light, along with the loss of current velocities and specific conductance data from a limited subset of stations, will dramatically hamper those efforts.