

Storm wreckage poses risk for river-cleanup workers

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A capsized Coast Guard vessel beneath the Rutgers Bridge. Delivery trucks and steel shipping containers washed ashore in Harrison. Huge chemical barrels littering Elmwood Park.



The debris deposited by superstorm Sandy includes fallen trees and less conventional objects.

Hurricane Irene and superstorm Sandy not only ruined homes, they littered the waterways with some unusual — and dangerous — debris.

The Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission's River Restoration workers have been pulling out storm wreckage of all sizes from the Passaic River and its tributaries for months. The debris has included:

* A 31-foot Coast Guard boat found under a Route 21 bridge in Belleville. Once used for search and rescue missions, the 45-year-old RV Riverwatch was most recently a research vessel for Montclair State University. It was abandoned just prior to Irene. The PVSC and state workers had to close one side of the highway for 10 hours while a crane loaded the boat onto a trailer. It will be disposed as scrap material.

* Four shipping containers and seven delivery trucks discovered washed ashore onto Cape May Street in Harrison and onto PSE&G property.

* Another truck body, blocking the river's navigation channel in Newark and presenting a "serious hazard to recreational boating and commercial shipping," according to the PVSC. It was removed by a ship-mounted crane.

In addition, a 17-foot boat had sunk and wedged itself under the PVSC dock on Newark Bay.

The PVSC recently finished a cleanup of Dundee Island in Elmwood Park, filling a 30-yard container with storm debris. It included 150-gallon chemical containers, which were removed by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Cleanups will continue through the spring, including along the Peckman River in Woodland Park this week.

"You never know what you'll find," PVSC spokeswoman Hollie Gilroy said.

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