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## Cleanup pulls hundreds of tires from Passaic River



Passaic River Tires 10/20/14

Mike DeFrancisci, executive director of the Passaic River Sewerage Commission, Rep. Bill Pascrell and Paterson Mayor Jose Torres speak at the Passaic River in Paterson, Oct. 20, 2014. (Myles Ma | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

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**PATERSON** — Thomas Scorsone wades into the Passaic River looking for tires. He peers into the water and probes the mud in his waders, issued by the Passaic River Sewerage Commission.

Reaching down, he tugs his quarry out of the water. It takes a few pulls to loosen it from the mud, but he manages to free the tire and roll it to the bank, where he plops it on its side.

Scorsone and two other commission workers would add more than a dozen links (and a shopping cart) to the rubber chain Monday morning in less than an hour. The collection was a short distance from a pile of about 1,000 tires the commission has pulled from the river in the past month in its third major cleanup of the river in as many years.

Cleaning the river is difficult work, Mike DeFrancisci, executive director of the sewerage commission, said.

“Unfortunately, one of the only ways to do it is to wait for the river levels to drop down to visually identify where the tires are and go in there manually and take them out,” he said.

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Rep. Bill Pascrell called on the state Department of Environmental Protection to crack down on dumping Passaic River and on residents to report illegal dumping to the police.

“It doesn’t make sense for Paterson to have a historic national park with a river going through it like this,” he said.

Mayor Jose Torres has made it a goal to promote the river as a recreation destination. The city is looking for approval to install five “environmental cameras” in the Bunker Hill section, near a bend in the Passaic River where debris accumulates, to catch dumpers.

The sewerage commission has pulled about 5,000 tires out of the river in three years. They are sent to Bridgestone for recycling.

While the commission is responsible for cleanup, it has no enforcement authority over the river, DeFrancisci said. In addition, it’s difficult to trace the source of the tires along the 80-mile river.

The sewerage commission instead focuses its efforts on education.

“I think for the most part [polluters] believe they’re not really impacting anyone,” DeFrancisci said.

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