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NEWS

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DURING WINTER MONTHS, PVSC REMAINS AT WORK ON RIVER RESTORATION ***PVSC's River Restoration Team Removes Capsized Boat, Other Debris in Post-Sandy and Irene Clean-Up***

NEWARK, NJ – Even before Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy sunk boats, damaged trees and deposited debris along the shore and waterways, the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC) was at work keeping river channels clear and safe for commerce and recreation. Through its River Restoration program, the PVSC has ensured that the Passaic River and its tributaries remain free of hazardous material that could pose navigational or environmental problems for surrounding residents and municipalities.

“PVSC crews have been working diligently all winter removing obstructions in the Passaic River and its tributaries,” said PVSC Executive Director Michael DeFrancisci. “PVSC has made clearing the various blockages and large debris deposits caused by both Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Irene a high priority.”

While trash, tires and shopping carts are fairly routine finds along the river banks, sometimes the team never knows what they might encounter.

Recently, a team of restoration experts pulled a 31 foot capsized boat – the ‘RV Riverwatch’ – from underneath the Rutgers Bridge on Route 21 in Belleville.

The ‘RV Riverwatch’ is a 1968, 31 foot former U.S. Coast Guard vessel that has had a long and illustrious history in search and rescue missions. It most recently was used as a research vessel for Montclair State University. It was abandoned under the Rutgers Street Bridge in Belleville just prior to Hurricane Irene.

In order to remove the boat, the PVSC along with the NJ Department of Transportation (NJDOT) had to close the northbound side of Route 21 at exit 6 from approximately 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Then, PVSC’s excavator could safely remove the boat from beneath the Bridge. Finally, a crane loaded the boat onto a trailer for delivery to PVSC. The river work area was curtained off with debris and petroleum booms as a precaution during the removal process. The boat will be dismantled by PVSC staff and disposed of as scrap materials.

In a continued effort to restore local waterways in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, the rogue vessel -- along with two steel containers and four delivery truck bodies removed from the river -- are believed to be a result of damage sustained from Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Irene and are part of PVSC's larger cleanup initiative following the historic storms.

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Since the creation of the PVSC's River Restoration Program in 1998, which is charged with preserving and protecting over 100 miles of area waterways, the PVSC has removed over 10,000 tons of debris from the Newark Bay, the Passaic River and its tributaries, and sponsored over 750 individual clean-ups along shorelines and in communities, along with educating about 200,000 students on how they can help protect the Passaic River and our environment.

"PVSC is proud to continue to assist in providing a cleaner and safer waterway for members of the community to safely enjoy," said PVSC Commissioner Kenneth J. Lucianin. "The agency is committed to protecting the Passaic River and understands the importance of operating the River Restoration program to ensure the long-term viability of our waterways," explained Lucianin.

To date, the PVSC has received approximately \$5.6 million in FEMA reimbursements for Superstorm Sandy-related expenses, with additional reimbursements anticipated in the future.

In addition to removing the capsized boat, some other recent projects include:

Steel Shipping Container and Truck Body Removal and Cleanup

Steel shipping or cargo containers are familiar items around the industrial areas in the PVSC service area. However, they prove problematic when found in the waterways.

PVSC was notified about a steel shipping container that had washed ashore in Harrison on Cape May Street during Hurricane Sandy. Upon investigation of the site, PVSC found two other steel containers and four delivery truck bodies that had suffered the same fate; in addition, three truck bodies and one steel container are on PSE&G property outside their security fence.

PVSC plans to remove the property with its crane, and then place it onto transport trailers for return or disposal. In addition, an adjacent property, NYNJ Path, has hurricane debris (wood, tires, and plastics) that PVSC plans to also remove in the near future.

In another restoration project, a truck body was discovered by PVSC's skimmer vessel crew at low tide in the Passaic River navigation channel in Newark. PVSC notified several authorities and eventually partner with the United States Army Corps of Engineers to remove the truck body. The Army Corps sent a ship mounted crane to the site to remove the obstruction, as well as the last truck body remaining on the NY/NJ Path line. The bodies were finally brought to PVSC by ship for disposal.

A serious hazard to recreational boating and commercial shipping has been corrected due to the diligence of PVSC.

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Completion of PVSC Skimmer Overhaul

PVSC's two skimmer vessels do yeoman's work clearing and cleaning the Newark Bay and Passaic River.

The off-season overhaul of the PVSC's Skimmer – the 'SV Newark Bay' – is complete and returned to the Passaic River on March 1. The vessel has spent the start of the year undergoing maintenance for the upcoming skimming season. The vessel undergoes rigorous maintenance such as: fluid changes, hydraulic system upgrades and rebuilds, top to bottom cleaning and repainting, as well as bearing and conveyor replacement. The skimmer will be operating out of PVSC's North Arlington offloading facility when it returns to the waters.

"The skimmer vessel is an integral part of PVSC's River Restoration process. The skimmer enables PVSC to find blockages and large debris in our waterways, and safely and efficiently clear them so as to help prevent obstacles and injury to boaters," said DeFrancisci.

Dundee Island Cleanup in Elmwood Park

PVSC recently completed a cleanup of Dundee Island in Elmwood Park, adjacent to the former Hillman Golf Site. PVSC responded with a one and a half week cleanup, filling a 30 yard container to the brim of Hurricane Irene debris. During the clean-up, PVSC discovered multiple 150 gallon chemical containers on the island, which were removed by DEP.

"The Dundee Dam has become a focus of PVSC, bordering Passaic and Bergen counties; the Dam catches a significant amount of debris from littering and natural occurrences," added Lucianin.

Removal of Center Console Vessel from PVSC's Dock

Recently, PVSC was notified that a submerged boat had wedged itself under the PVSC dock.

A 17 foot center console design vessel was located underneath the PVSC's south dock and steps were taken to identify the owner and recover the vessel. PVSC's River Restoration personnel removed the boat from Newark Bay using an excavator and other equipment, and temporarily stored it on PVSC property (WITCO). When approved for disposal, the boat will be dismantled by PVSC staff and disposed of as scrap materials.

Access to PVSC's docks is important to commerce and other transactions that take place along the Newark Bay. Removing the vessel was crucial to the operations of the PVSC, as impediments to incoming ships would cause safety and other hazards.

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Paterson Straight Street Tire and Debris Removal

During the fall, PVSC concluded a project in which the restoration team removed over 2,000 tires and other debris from the Passaic River near Straight Street in the City of Paterson. Begun over the summer, the cause of the tire and debris field came most likely from littering and illegal dumping activity, according to local officials.

PVSC personnel used specialized equipment on site to remove the obstructions that were impeding the flow of the waterway.

“The goal of this project was to eliminate any potential public health or safety concerns regarding the debris that are in the River and the area adjacent to the river. The removal of litter and illegal dumping debris in the River in Paterson will continue to be a focus of PVSC,” said DeFrancisci.

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In order to protect and preserve local streams and rivers from water pollution, the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission operates one of the country's oldest and largest treatment plants for the wastewaters of northern New Jersey, serving over 1.4 million people in five counties.