

May 16, 2014

Update on April 30, 2014 Queens/ Brooklyn Flooding Event

On April 30th, 2014 more than five inches of rain fell on New York City; it was the tenth wettest day ever recorded. While several areas experienced some flooding, the neighborhoods bordering Spring Creek and Ralph Creek were particularly hard hit. The day of the storm, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection dispatched crews to New Lots and Lindenwood to evaluate whether the local drainage and wastewater collection systems operated at full capacity. DEP determined that its Spring Creek Combined Sewer Overflow Retention Facility on Flatlands Avenue did not function as intended.

The Spring Creek facility, which went into service in the mid-1970s, contains large tanks that can store up to 20 million gallons of rainfall and wastewater. The facility is only used when rainfall rates are so great that the capacity of the two nearby treatment plants is exceeded. Excess wastewater is then diverted into the Spring Creek retention facility, to be temporarily stored until the storm ends.

The April 30th storm produced so much rain that it exceeded the capacity of the 26th Ward and Jamaica Wastewater Treatment Plants, and the Spring Creek facility also reached its storage limit late that evening. When the tanks at Spring Creek can no longer accept more flow, the system is designed to release excess water directly into Jamaica Bay. This untreated wastewater is called combined sewer overflow (“CSO”).

The Spring Creek facility was recently modernized and a series of electronic level sensors and transmitters are now used to determine when excess CSO needs to be released, based upon a number of criteria including the tidal elevations. DEP found that the new electronic system malfunctioned, and releases into the bay did not promptly occur. As a result, stormwater and wastewater backed up into streets and homes in parts of the New Lots and Lindenwood neighborhoods.

Following the flooding event, City officials went door to door and distributed Department of Health literature about mold prevention, and claims forms that allow residents to seek reimbursement for damages. These forms must be filed with the Comptroller within 90 days of the event.

Work is continuing to fully identify and correct the equipment malfunction. Until that work is completed and tested, DEP staff will monitor and manually operate the facility during storms.

DEP will seek recovery of damages from any and all responsible parties to the extent possible under applicable contracts and law.