



sanitation

Edward Grayson Commissioner

Testimony of Edward Grayson, Commissioner New York City Department of Sanitation

Hearing on the City's Resiliency Efforts and Preparation for Storms

New York City Council Committees on Resiliency and Waterfronts, Transportation and Environmental Protection

**Tuesday, September 14, 2021
10:00 A.M.**

Good afternoon Chair Brannan, Chair Gennaro, Chair Rodriguez and members of the City Council Committees on Resiliency and Waterfronts, Transportation and Environmental Protection. I am Edward Grayson, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's preparation for and response to the devastating flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Ida.

First, I want to recognize the tremendous and devastating impact of this storm on so many New Yorkers. Their homes, their most treasured possessions, their livelihoods – all gone. And in some cases, very sadly, our fellow New Yorkers lost their lives.

In advance of extreme rainfall and other tropical weather events, the Sanitation Department works closely with our fellow agencies to implement planning and preparedness activities. As Commissioner Scrivani described, DSNY plays an important role in the City's Flash Flood Emergency Plan. On Tuesday, August 31, DSNY, DEP and DOT inspected and cleaned 1,000 catch basins in major flooding hotspots, as well as all catch basins on major highways. DSNY also regularly conducts tests and preparations at our facilities, ensuring that we have continuity of operations to help the City recover after major weather events.

As soon as the rain began to slow overnight on September 1, the Department pivoted into and emergency response posture. By Thursday morning, Department supervisors were out in the field surveying affected neighborhoods and developing deployment strategies for Emergency Response operations. That day, we deployed the first crews to begin cleaning up debris, and we have not stopped since. We worked with local community leaders to bring dumpsters to the hardest-hit communities, and we immediately informed both residents and employees to expect the Department to work through the Labor Day holiday. And while many employees themselves were affected by flooding at home, the Department continued to provide regular refuse and recycling collection – more than 12,000 tons per day – with only minor delays.

Early in the morning on September 2nd, we worked with the Department of Transportation to suspend alternate side parking regulations, and that suspension was later extended through the Rosh Hashanah holiday on September 8. The Department also suspended all enforcement

activities for dirty sidewalks, trash setouts, and other sanitation violations, and that enforcement suspension continues in affected areas.

Since that Thursday, DSNY has provided round-the-clock debris removal operations in neighborhoods affected by the storm. To date, Sanitation Workers have worked more than 60,000 hours on debris removal and storm cleanup activities, removing more than 15,000 tons of debris, including more than 7,500 tons in the borough of Queens. Our crews have repeatedly visited every affected block, coming back day after day as residents continue the slow, painful and tearful work of removing debris, possessions, furniture and treasured keepsakes from their homes.

In addition to our work, the City Cleanup Corps also contributed to the recovery work. Immediately following the storm, thousands of corps members were out clearing accumulated litter and storm debris across the city. Since last week, 140 corps members have helped seniors and other New Yorkers in need remove storm debris, furniture, and appliances from their homes. To date, corps members have loaded an estimated 48,600 bags of litter and debris citywide.

I have spent the last two weeks in neighborhoods across New York City, speaking to residents, supervising operations, and working on the ground with many of my fellow commissioners who join me at this hearing today. We know the work is not yet done. Many homeowners and residents continue to sift through damaged belongings and pull sheetrock off the walls. I want them to know that we are here for them. We will keep coming until the work is done.

I want to thank all of the Sanitation Workers, uniformed officers and support staff for their dedication and commitment over these last two weeks. They have proven yet again that they are heroes, truly essential workers that will move literal mountains to help their fellow New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.