

Widespread Flooding Impacts Mid-Atlantic States

NYWEA Membership Mobilizes to Help

by Joseph Fiegl

Torrential rains across the Mid-Atlantic United States during the last week of June 2006 caused widespread flooding and damage stretching from North Carolina to New York State.

Some of the most highly publicized flooding was in Washington DC, where more than 12 inches of rain fell. This event, classified as a 300-year storm in some areas, caused flooding that closed several businesses and US government buildings, including the National Archives, the Internal Revenue Service headquarters, the Department of Justice, and the Commerce Department. Several roads in the Washington DC area were washed out, stranding motorists and leaving highways impassable. Rescue workers had to evacuate families from their homes via boat to take them to safety.

Large expanses of New York State were inundated by floodwaters. Close to seven inches of rain fell from June 26 through June 28, 2006 in some locations, causing record flooding and damage in over 20 counties in New York State. Numerous rivers and streams were several feet over their flood stages. A prime example was the Mohawk River at Little Falls, NY, where the river crested at 19.72 feet, a record level according to data from the National Weather Service.

One of the most tragic events during the floods occurred when two truck drivers died when their trucks sank into 25-foot deep holes crossing all four lanes of traffic on Interstate 88 in Delaware County,



Emergency personnel respond to the I-88 collapse and truck accident. The flooding collapse spanned all four lanes in both directions.



A view of the culverts that washed out under Interstate 88, near the Unadilla, NY exit as a result of heavy rains on June 29, 2006. Two truck drivers were killed driving into the collapsed highway.



Photo by Sandy Lizlovs, NYSDEC- Region 7

The Binghamton Johnson City Wastewater Treatment Plant in Vestal, NY after the floodwaters began to subside.

NY. The holes had appeared when culverts under the highway were washed away by the floodwaters. This damage led to New York State troopers closing a 30-mile stretch of this Interstate.

NYWEA Reacts to Flooding Crisis

The wastewater industry in New York State was severely impacted by the June 2006 floods. Several wastewater plants were completely washed out when local streams and rivers overtopped their banks. Exacerbating these situations, many electrical substations were submerged and had lost power, leaving plants to run on emergency generators. The flood damage left the local wastewater operators and maintenance personnel working around the clock to restore the plants to some marginal operational levels.

As a joint effort with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) posted an announcement to its entire membership, asking members to assist the affected wastewater treatment plants in getting equipment and treatment trains back online. Within hours of the announcement, NYWEA members from across the state responded. Manufacturers offered equipment; members called the damaged wastewater plants and offered aid; others contacted NYWEA directly to see how they could be of service. Some NYWEA members offered to leave immediately after work on a Friday to spend their whole weekend assisting these facilities. Although most wastewater plants had instituted emergency plans almost immediately after the dam-

age, the plants were thankful for the offer of assistance. One NYWEA member who contacted these plants, commented: "It looks like the crews of all the facilities did a remarkable job restoring service."

Governor George Pataki declared a State Disaster Emergency for Broome, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Madison, Montgomery, Otsego, Schoharie, Tioga, Oneida, Orange, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Sullivan, Tompkins, and Ulster counties. Across the eastern seaboard, it is estimated that the June 2006 floods were the worst to hit the region since 1979 when the remnants of Hurricane David, originally a Category 5 storm, battered the Mid-Atlantic.

Although events the magnitude of the June 2006 floods are not a common occurrence, there is always the potential that a future disaster may affect wastewater operations for service providers in New York State. It is one of NYWEA's goals to facilitate a network of communication so that when our fellow wastewater professionals are in need, our membership and other service providers and communities are aware of the problems and can offer assistance.

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