

## **2013 Beach Season Roles and Responsibilities**

Under the extraordinary circumstances that SuperStorm Sandy created and the amount of destruction and debris along New Jersey's coast, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) have initiated an enhanced Standard Operating Procedure for all recreational bathing beaches to ensure that the State, local health authorities, municipalities and beach patrols are making every effort to remove debris and hazards from beaches and bathing areas to make them as safe as possible for the public. The following outlines each agency's roles and responsibilities:

### **Municipalities**

- Pre-operational Assessment - The New Jersey State Sanitary Code Chapter IX Public Recreational Bathing at N.J.A.C. 8:26 (Recreational Bathing Regulations) requires a pre-operational assessment for bathing beaches before a bathing beach opens each year. A pre-operational assessment and field investigation shall be conducted at the bathing beach and the surrounding areas to identify physical hazards. The intent of the rule is to identify hazards or debris that could cause injury or entrapment and to identify any new potential sources of pollution. The pre-operational assessment is to be completed by the owner or operator, which in the case of most New Jersey beaches is the municipality.
- Removal of Debris - Depending on the type of debris observed, the municipality's Department of Public Works and/or Beach Patrol will remove it, or mark its location with a buoy if it cannot be removed. All debris that cannot be removed will be reported by the municipality to the DEP Hotline, in which they will be instructed to complete the: *Superstorm Sandy: NJDEP Waterway Debris Removal Project Beach Debris Removal Request*.
- Daily Beach Assessments - Municipalities are encouraged to conduct a physical investigation for debris in the bathing area every morning prior to opening a beach for public recreation. This should include having public works conduct routine raking and visual assessment of the beach for larger debris, as well as removing all debris above the mean low tide line.
- Lifeguards - Lifeguards or other appropriate employees will conduct visual assessments of bathing area for debris including such methods as: wading, swimming, rowing or paddling into bathing area looking for submerged or floating debris. Lifeguards or Public Works employees should remove smaller debris for proper disposal including nails and other small hazards. Larger debris as noted above should be marked for removal and immediately reported to the DEP Hotline and Local Health Authority (LHA).

Lifeguards should be instructed to conduct frequent assessments of their bathing areas (daily prior to opening for the day, and during daily swims, etc.) to be alert to any changes. Lifeguards should receive specific training on possible risks related to the aftermath of Sandy to prepare and equip them to handle unique

situations. SuperStorm Sandy has caused a significant change to the beach profile. Many areas have an especially steep drop at the shallow edge of the bathing beach and a sand bar beyond the drop-off. These conditions may lead to bathers going from waist deep to overhead quickly and could require more rescues than in the past. Rip currents could also increase this year due to the change in beach profile. Lifeguards should be aware that beach conditions and debris locations can change rapidly and are likely to change throughout the summer season.

On May 7, 2013, DOH contacted all New Jersey Open Water Lifeguard Certification Agencies regarding mandatory beach assessments and ocean water lifeguard training post-Sandy. DOH also sent to these agencies the 4/18/13 joint letter from DEP and DOH regarding the mandatory pre-operational assessment and a copy of a pre-operational checklist.

#### **Local, County or Regional Health Department(s)**

- If the LHA determines that debris poses a health or safety hazard to the public, portions of the beach may be closed until the DEP contractor or municipal public works can remove the debris. The LHA must contact the DOH when they become aware of these situations.
- DOH is notified about beach wash-ups through the LHA, media, or public complaints.
- The LHA reports needle sticks to the DOH via form PHSS-6, "Confidential Medical Waste Exposure Report."
- Any and all syringe wash-ups are to be reported to DEP by the LHA.
- Weekly Water Quality Monitoring – LHAs perform water quality monitoring as part of the Cooperative Coastal Monitoring Program, which began Monday, May 20th. It is not expected that water quality will have any continued impact from SuperStorm Sandy. Recreational water quality standards are handled in accordance with DOH rules and CCMP protocol.

#### **Department of Health**

- Recreational Bathing Beach Approval - In accordance with Recreational Bathing Regulations, it is the health authority's responsibility to inspect a public recreational bathing place prior to its opening for seasonal use, to determine compliance with the regulations, and give formal approval to operate. DOH delegates that responsibility to the LHAs, except for state parks.
- The DOH has received and reviewed copies of the pre-operational assessments from all DEP State Park bathing areas.
- Closing of Recreational Beaches – The Department of Health delegated authority to local, county and regional health departments to open and close recreational

beaches. However the Commissioner of the Department of Health retains the ultimate authority to open or close bathing beaches.

- The LHA determines in the first instance if a beach should be closed. DOH is available 24/7 to assist any LHA in need. If the situation appears to warrant closure, and LHA does not close a beach or move a bathing area away to a safer location, the DOH will contact the LHA to discuss the circumstances. If DOH has reason to believe that a bathing beach area should be closed, and it has not been closed by the LHA, DOH will send a staff member to assess the situation. DOH will determine whether closure is necessary. DOH will consult with DEP, as necessary, in making that determination.

### **Department of Environmental Protection**

- Large Beach Debris Removal – The State’s waterway debris removal contractor (“Contractor”) is available for the removal of certain debris from NJ’s beaches. Debris that may be removed by the contractor are subject to certain limitations (see Protocol for Removal of Storm Debris from Beaches and Beach Debris Removal Request form.)

The Contractor may remove Large Debris and Dangerous Debris.

Large Debris shall mean items that generally are too big for a municipality to remove as part of its routine maintenance operations. Such items generally are:

- bigger than a coffee table;
- longer than 3 feet; or
- too heavy to be lifted by laborers.

Dangerous Debris shall include the following items that are not Litter:

- Sharp objects: e.g., sheet metal, aluminum siding pieces, boards with nails, glass.
- Large hazardous items: home heating oil tanks, propane tanks greater than 40 lbs, 30-55 gallon drums, gasoline tanks from vessels or vehicles, etc.
- Small hazardous items: propane tanks up to 40 lbs, 5-gallon buckets, household chemicals (bleach, oil-based paint, lawn pesticides, cleaners, motor oil, gas cans for lawn equipment, pool chemicals, etc.).

- Coastal Flights - The DEP is assisting in this pre-operational assessment of bathing areas beyond the low tide line. DEP conducted several helicopter surveillance flyovers of the NJ coastline on April 8th, May 2nd, and May 17th to identify submerged debris. Routine flyovers, six days a week, began on May 20th. If debris is observed during a coastal flight, DEP will contact the municipality with coordinates and/or street-end location.
- Debris Reporting / NJDEP Hotline - The DEP Hotline will notify the State’s appropriate Debris Removal Contractor and the Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring who will coordinate with the LHAs to conduct a visual assessment.