



The City of New York Department of Sanitation



Testimony of Kathryn Garcia, Commissioner

**Oversight Hearing on the New York City Department of Sanitation
Borough Based Snow Plans for the 2014-2015 Snow Season
and Intro Nos. 226, 300 and 469
Before the New York City Council Committee on
Sanitation and Solid Waste**

**Tuesday, October 28, 2014
1:00 P.M.
City Hall – Committee Room**

Good afternoon Chair Reynoso and members of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste. I am Kathryn Garcia, Commissioner for the New York City Department of Sanitation. With me here this afternoon are Dennis Diggins, First Deputy Commissioner of Operations, and Steven Costas, Chief of the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection. I would like to thank Chair Reynoso and the members of the Committee for this opportunity today to discuss the Department's Draft Borough-based Snow Plans and our preparedness for the 2014-2015 winter season. I will also separately address each of the three bills under consideration today by this Committee, after which I will be happy to answer your questions and address any comments.

Before I begin, I also wish to thank members of the Council and their staff who attended three snow fighting forums I recently hosted. I am pleased with the turnout at these events, and confident that these forums provided insight into how the Department manages its snow fighting operations, as well as helpful information.

Since last year's snow season, the Department has reviewed its own internal operations, strategies and policies in order to improve its future performance during snow events. The Draft Snow Plans detail the Department's snow-fighting procedures from the onset of precipitation to clearing operations after a major snowfall. The Plans include the allocation of personnel and equipment resources, inter-agency coordination of services, and customer service protocols. They also outline new policies and programs we are implementing to enhance our response and effectiveness. The Final Borough Snow Plans will be published on the Department's website next month.

As you know, during the early stage of a snow event, the Department deploys salt spreaders to reduce the accumulation of snow and prevent the formation of icy conditions on more than 19,000 roadway lane miles across the five boroughs. Throughout the duration of a storm, Department field managers constantly monitor roadway conditions, equipment use, and variations in weather patterns. Our field officers report this information on an hourly basis back to their respective borough commands, which is subsequently relayed to our Operations headquarters.

During a light snowstorm, salt spreading operations continue for the duration of the snowfall. Once the snow accumulation becomes greater than two inches, the Department deploys its snow plows in accordance with planned routes and priorities, while continuing to spread salt to maximize vehicular traction on the road surface. Plowing operations continue until all of the City's traffic lanes are passable. Depending on the amount of snow that accumulates, Sanitation Workers may begin piling, hauling and clearing operations, as other crews resume refuse collection operations.

It is important to understand that snowfall can lead to the disruption of normal traffic patterns and public transportation, and may last for extended periods of time. The Department makes every effort to clear snow and ice from the City's highways and streets as expeditiously as possible, but it can be a lengthy process, particularly when persistent or heavy snowfall occurs combined with falling temperatures and high winds. Every storm brings different challenges which impact the speed, with which the streets are cleared, including intensity, temperature, time of day and accumulation. We ask the public to be patient so that Department workers, who are performing under these tough conditions, can safely complete their tasks timely and effectively.

Advanced detailed planning and preparation for winter weather conditions in the City is an established practice for the Department that begins every Spring and consists of:

- Reviewing all of the City's snow-plowing routes – which number approximately 3,000, and adjusting them as necessary;
- Reviewing personnel, prepping fleet, maximizing inventory levels, and accessing equipment needs, and identifying additional temporary sites for storing road de-icing materials, and locations for melting snow;
- Undertaking preventative maintenance on all snow equipment and upgrading them as necessary;
- Meeting with local community boards;
- Conducting refresher courses in spreading and plowing operations, and equipment training;
- Performing snow drill exercises; and
- Coordinating services with other agencies.

For the 2014-15 snow season, we began our planning with a view toward maximizing our efficiency and response this winter. We reviewed our internal operations, strategies and policies to identify what measures we could undertake to enhance our performance, organization and supervision. We also evaluated our strategies with other city agencies, including the MTA, Port Authority and the TBTA to enhance the inter-agency coordination of services during snow emergencies, and in our communications with the general public.

This year new policies and improvements include:

- Implementing a new snow sectoring routing pilot in all districts of Manhattan and Staten Island, as well as one district each in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, sectoring eliminates the differentiation between secondary and tertiary

streets. We believe this initiative will achieve efficiencies by removing duplicative and overlapping travel mileage to improve our response time;

- Acquisition of fifty (50) new skid-steer units to our fleet that will be used to clear crosswalks, bus stops and protected bike lanes;
- Enhancements to our information technology by installing more than 2,000 new AT&T CalAmp GPS devices on our snow fleet, piloting dead reckoning devices on 38 salt spreaders to determine if the devices improve AVL accuracy, and the deployment of a new GPS field application to improve supervision;
- Re-tooling our data collection and measurement of progress in the field on PlowNYC by introducing a new algorithm designed to improve the display of streets plowed by the Department and to reduce “false positive” segments that may inaccurately show what has been completed; and
- Undertaking significant outreach to the public to recruit and have available a pool of temporary emergency laborers as may be needed to shovel out bus paths, crosswalks, underpasses and overpasses, and traffic medians during severe snow events, that began October 20th.

Of course, a plan is only as good as our ability to put it into action, and we are ramping-up our snow drills in advance of this winter. Next month we will complete a full-scale snow dress rehearsal. Snow Drills entail our personnel loading salt spreaders, attaching plows to the trucks, attaching chains to the trucks and spreaders, field testing of GPS equipment, testing of emergency radio talk groups, and operating equipment along plowing and spreader routes. Conducting a mock drill reinforces the importance of early coordination among the many agencies that provide essential services, from public transportation to emergency response.

In short, we are prepared, and our Draft Snow Plans provide an outline of procedures to evidence our preparedness. The 2013-14 snow season served as a benchmark for the most recent severe winter, and we have been preparing for another possible severe season this year. The Department is a dynamic agency that responds quickly and learns from past experiences. Last winter allowed us to re-examine our snow fighting procedures, and future Department practices will benefit from that experience.

Turning now to the bills, I will address the first bill on today's agenda, Intro No. 226. This bill requires, by January 1, 2016, that all snow plows be equipped with flashing lights running 24/7, and audible warnings from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The Department's salt spreaders, front-end loaders and haulsters are already equipped with flashing lights. The Department's collection trucks that we convert to snow plows, are all equipped with visible LED flashers which last longer and are brighter than regular vehicle lights. The Department recognizes the important safety goal of the bill requiring the installation and use of audible warning signals, but I would recommend that this aspect of the bill first be studied due to the variables associated with ambient noise that can potentially create a violation of the City's Noise Code.

I would also point out that, due to the number and size of our trucks and snow plows, they have a distinct presence on the City's roadways and are difficult to miss. We do not observe the general public walking on City streets. The requirements for installing flashing lights, and particularly audible warnings, seem better suited for the smaller snowplows that service parking lots and other non-public areas where pedestrians are present.

The second bill, Intro No. 300, would allow the Department to issue violations to property owners for the failure to remove the snow and ice that accumulates on a fire hydrant. The bill's overriding goal is to provide our City's firefighters access to the fire hydrants during a fire emergency, and the ability to locate a hydrant following a significant snowfall that often buries the hydrant from sight. For these reasons, the Department fully supports this bill.

The last bill on today's agenda, Intro No. 469, requires the Department to submit annual reports on snow events, beginning March 1, 2016, for the prior calendar year. The report is to include the amount of each snowfall measured in inches, the percentage of roadways cleared by the Department in eight, twelve and twenty-four hour periods after each snow event, and the number of 3-1-1 complaints by borough. Alternatively, the bill provides that this report may be prepared and submitted in the Mayor's Management Report. As you know, pursuant to Local Law 26 of 2011, an annual report is prepared by the City's Office of Emergency Management and submitted each year by November 15th which reports on the prior winter snow season. We believe this information would be better served by inclusion into the OEM annual report for conciseness and uniformity. Also, the reporting date and reporting period set forth under this bill do

not coincide with our snow season that concludes at the end of March, nor at the end of the calendar year in December as proposed under this bill.

In closing, I want to assure you that snow-fighting is a core agency mission, and the Department's workforce understands that their performance is critical to keeping this City functioning 24/7. With over 6,400 Sanitation Workers on staff for the 2014-2015 snow season, I am confident that the Department's workforce can and will respond timely and effectively to any major snow event, and when necessary, Sanitation Workers will be temporarily re-deployed to other districts based on unique circumstances to ensure that every district in every borough across the City receives the same level of service. Our front-line personnel are key, but it is a team effort including our mechanics, supervisory staff and even our contracts staff. As the onset of the official snow season approaches next month, I appreciate this opportunity to engage this Committee and members of the Council in the present review process of our Draft Borough Snow Plans, and look forward to your input and receiving all of your comments and suggestions.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to testify this afternoon. My staff and I will be happy to answer your questions.

TESTIMONY OF HARRY NESPOLI

**PRESIDENT UNIFORMED SANITATIONMEN'S ASSOCIATION,
LOCAL 831, INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS**

BEFORE

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT HEARING**

CONCERNING DSNY'S 2015-16 SNOW PLAN

HON. ANTONIO REYNOSO

CHAIRPERSON

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2014

Good afternoon, Chairman Reynoso and members of the committee. On behalf of the nearly 6,300 men and women of the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Over the course of the past several years it seems our city has hit with some of the most powerful and crippling storms in recorded history. From the Christmas Blizzard of 2010 to the deadly and devastating Super-storm Sandy our members have been there to clear the snow and remove the debris.

They have done so with a level of expertise and professionalism that is unrivaled anywhere in the world.

We can only be successful if we have the full support of the city government. Unfortunately, as we learned during the Christmas Blizzard 2010, that was not always the case.

Despite numerous attempts to convince the previous administration that we did not have an adequate headcount, or the equipment to handle a major storm, our words fell on deaf ears. We know how that worked out.

And in a response typical of that administration they addressed the problem by offering private contractors \$1 million to remain on standby to clear the tertiary streets. One million dollars to stand by! And, when called upon to work, some of those operators never showed up, or did not have the proper equipment to do the job.

That has never been a problem with our people.

Yet, in looking at the proposed plan, we see that once again "standby" contracts have been put out for the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island. I think the city could certainly make better use of those dollars than spending them on contractors waiting for a snowfall.

As I've said over and over again. Given the proper workforce and equipment our people can, and we will get the job done.

Despite our disagreements concerning the use of private contractors, and thanks to the members of this council, the department and City Hall have been more receptive and responsive in providing the manpower and equipment we need.

We are especially grateful for your help.

Let me start with headcount. As I mentioned earlier despite our warnings in 2009, that there was an inadequate headcount to deal with a major storm, we went into that snow season with a headcount of less than 5,700.

Today, our headcount is now close to 6,300 and in my first review of the report it appears the department is looking to increase our number to 6,400. Thank you.

For years we have sat here and requested not just more equipment, but equipment better suited to clearing snow in our city. Vehicles like skid steer loaders and haulsters, which are small enough to clear curbs and can carry a heavy load of salt, sand and snow, weren't part of our fleet.

As we head into the new snow season I see the department now has a fleet of 82 haulsters and 37 skid steers. The addition of these vehicles, along with an increase of large spreaders and plowable trucks, are as welcome as the new recruits.

We are also interested to see and hear more about the department's new "Snow Sectoring" program. As we understand it, this pilot program will be launched throughout Manhattan and Staten Island, and in portions of other boroughs. In the pilot areas "primary, secondary and tertiary" street plowing designations will simply be designated as "critical and sector."

As I understand it, unlike the previous system when hit with heavy storms plowing will begin on all streets at the same time. As I said we are anxious to hear more details about this program.

So as we prepare for the upcoming winter forecasters are warning of cold winter, but with a snowfall of 30 inches. Of course, no matter what the weather people say today, our fates will be decided by El Nino and the Polar Vortex.

In the words of Mark Twain "everyone talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it." Well, that may be true, but when we're hit with 30 inches of snow, we will be there to clean up the mess.

Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 10/28/14

Name: Rahmyn Garcia (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: DSNY

Address: 125 Worth St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 469 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 10/28/2014

Name: Thomas DeVito (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 28-40 41st Street

I represent: Transportation Alternatives

Address: 127 West 26th Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 10/28/2014

Name: HARRY NESPOLI (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 25 CLIFF ST

I represent: LOCAL 831 IBT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

FIRST DEPUTY
Name: COMMISSIONER FOR OPERATIONS
Address: DENNIS DIGGINS
I represent: DSNY
Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 10/28/14

Name: Bob Bishop
Address: 25 CLIFF ST
I represent: LOCAL 831 IDT
Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: STEVEN COSTAS, DIRECTOR

Address: OF BUREAU OF CLEANING

I represent: + COLLECTION

Address: DEPT. OF SANITATION

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 469 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10/23/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOANNA OLTMAN SMITH

Address: 829 President St.

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms