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DEPARTMENT OF WATER & WATER SUPPLY  
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TO: THE MAYOR  
FROM: Robert F. Cross, Commissioner  
RE: Accomplishments Report 2009

**Following is a summary of accomplishments for the Department of Water and Water Supply.**

One of the most precious resources we have in the great City of Albany is our pure and abundant supply of drinking water. Albany residents have enjoyed this wonderful natural resource for more than seven decades since the sparkling and clean Alcove Reservoir water first began flowing into our City in 1932.

Albany residents have come to expect safe and wholesome water when they turn on their taps. In fact, Albany's water quality was recognized when it was judged the best tasting drinking water in New York State during a recent statewide competition. But beyond taste, Albany water continues to meet and exceed all Federal and State quality standards and remains the envy of communities throughout the Capital District and beyond. Although we always encourage water conservation, Albany residents have experienced a brief period of water use restriction only once in the entire 77 year history of the system.

Over the past several years, more than \$65 million has been invested to upgrade and improve Albany water and sewer systems, modernizing the City's water filtration plant, replacing problematic underground water and sewer pipes, and stepping up maintenance and monitoring of the entire underground system of aging pipes and valves.

To be sure, Albany's infrastructure is old. Fifty-five miles of the 376 miles of water mains were installed in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and many of the 365 miles of sewer pipes have been in operation since before the Civil War. So the Albany Water Department must continuously repair, replace and upgrade various parts of the system in order to meet current quality standards and ensure there is sufficient drinking water for homes, businesses, and New York State government. We remain steadfast in this mission.

The Albany Water Department is on the cutting edge of technology, thanks to an aggressive program of modernization strongly supported and encouraged by Mayor Jennings. One of the most useful and efficient tools in our arsenal is the computerized leak detection equipment that uses sound waves to detect leaks. Albany has discovered 157 hidden underground leaks which not only waste water, but also help to set the stage for future emergencies when voids are created by escaping water, eventually collapsing the ground above. All 157 of these wasteful and potentially dangerous leaks were repaired by Albany Water Department staff. We continue to survey all 376 miles of water mains every year, looking for hidden underground leaks, making repairs as needed. The National League of cities hailed the City's leak detection program as a model for communities all across the nation.

Also, with the strong support of Mayor Jennings, we were able to construct a \$3.7 million state-of-the-art ultraviolet treatment facility, the largest of its kind in New York State, another step in helping to ensure the high quality of Albany's drinking water along with addressing concerns over the danger of chlorine-resistant organisms. The facility won the coveted Diamond Award for optimizing energy efficiency from the American Council of Engineering Companies of New York State.

Maintenance of a system as old as Albany's takes substantial investment of time, planning, and resources. But the rewards of an aggressive preventive maintenance are extraordinary. Over the past 13 years, the number of water main and service leaks has dropped from a high of 375 breaks a year in 1996 to an average of 60 to 70 breaks per year, an extraordinary accomplishment for the Albany system, many parts of which date to the 1800's. And we continue to work on reducing that number even further, which translates into a significant savings in both manpower, supplies, and equipment.

In spite of the cost to maintain the aging water and sewer infrastructure, Albany has been able to keep its water rates low—in fact, the cost of Albany water continues to be lower than the cost of water in most other Capital District communities. In 2003, the Department undertook an aggressive \$5 million program to replace the old and often inaccurate water meters in homes and businesses throughout the City. The new radio meters, read automatically from a vehicle, ensure a more accurate and timely meter reading for residents. The project was completed under budget and ahead of schedule. Now, residents pay for all the water they use, but only the water they use, with internal leaks detected more rapidly, saving money for our customers. In addition, Albany currently sells water to two neighboring municipalities and is aggressively marketing its abundant water supply to other communities.

Protecting the City's precious water supply is a top priority of the Department, which employs a certified guard force to protect the Alcove and Basic Creek, and Loudonville Reservoirs, the water treatment plant and a host of other Department facilities. In addition, a sophisticated system of cameras and other surveillance equipment helps to ensure residents that their system is being protected.

As old as many of the City water mains are, some of the sewer mains are even older, with brick and slate pipes carrying the City's sewerage to the Albany County-operated sewer treatment plants. The City has undertaken an aggressive program to survey all 365 miles of sewer pipes, starting first with the areas experiencing the greatest number of problems. In an effort to reduce basement, street, and backyard flooding, which frequently occurs in older communities during extraordinary storm events, Mayor Jennings instituted a backwater grant program providing \$1,500 grant towards the installation of a valve in qualified properties. The Department also has undertaken a number of capital projects to reduce neighborhood flooding.

At the same time, the City is working with other Capital District communities to reduce the amount of stormwater overflows into the Hudson River during significant rain events. These efforts, coupled with the City's own sewer maintenance and rehabilitation program, will be key to solving many of the problems facing residents and those wishing to recreate along the City's popular and revitalized waterfront, a proud hallmark of the Jennings Administration.