

Government of the District of Columbia



DC Department of Public Works

Testimony of
William O. Howland, Jr.
Director

**“Performance Oversight Hearing on the
Department of Public Works FY 2013-FY 2014”**

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT
Mary M. Cheh, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
Room 412
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Friday, February 28, 2014
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**TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM O. HOWLAND, JR., DIRECTOR
DC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
“PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
WORKS FISCAL YEARS 2013-2014”
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
THE ENVIRONMENT
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2014**

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairperson Cheh, members of the Council and staff. I am William O. Howland, Jr., Director of the Department of Public Works. I am here today to present testimony about the Department’s FY 2013 and FY 2014 performance.

The mission of the Department of Public Works is to provide environmentally healthy municipal services that are both ecologically sound and cost effective. To that end, DPW serves all District residents, businesses, visitors and commuters by providing:

- Trash, recycling, litter, household hazardous waste, and e-cycling collection and disposal.
- Street and alley cleaning.
- Solid waste education and enforcement.
- Snow removal.
- Parking enforcement, including towing, booting, removing and impounding abandoned and dangerous vehicles.
- Fleet management, including acquisition and disposal, fueling, and vehicle maintenance services.

THE FOUR-LETTER WORD SPOKEN TOO OFTEN

To say that this has been a very active snow season is an understatement. In October, I presented testimony on the 2013-2014 snow program that cited statistics from recent snow seasons. We have eclipsed the total of the last three years’ snowfall amounts and March starts tomorrow.

Already, we have had more than 20 mobilizations. The 11 inches that fell February 13 brought out contract plows for the first time since 2010. Since February 13, we have had four more snow events, including three this week.

At this time, I want to thank our trash and recycling collection customers for their patience despite being inconvenienced by collections missed due to snow and ice in the alleys and streets. Unfortunately, winter isn’t over, yet. Next week we are expecting more snow.

Thanks to increased use of the brine/beet juice mixture, training drivers, and our snow coordinator’s relentless pursuit of salt, the District Snow Team has met each storm with the resources necessary to clear the streets well ahead of established standards.

As I mentioned in October, we have upgraded our use of technology in the snow program. Through the AVL system, we better track assets during snow events and new modems and salt/plow sensors are being used.

Our Zone Captains are gaining greater situational awareness and have real time location of assets and salting and plowing activity through their in-field notepads.

In FY 2013, we built the new larger Reno salt dome, which has improved our ability to treat the District's streets. We were happy to host the taping of NBC4's winter weather special at the new dome this past December, just after the season's first snow storm.

Another first this year is our use of pet safe deicer on bridge sidewalks. We got an added bonus from this experiment: the deicer is very effective in preventing ice from bonding to the sidewalks in addition to protecting pets' paws.

This year we got a real boost in our effort to clear sidewalks after a snow or ice storm. Serve DC has joined forces with us by creating a volunteer cadre to clear sidewalks of the elderly and disabled.

For several years, we have used moral persuasion to increase the number of property owners – commercial and residential – to clear their sidewalks and we are seeing progress. As I surveyed the streets during and after snow storms, I am seeing more bare sidewalks than ever before. Moral persuasion is working.

I also want to salute the Snow Team, which consists of DPW, DDOT, DGS; OUC; DC Water; DOC; HSEMA; MPD; FEMS; and DCPS. Each agency's employees are to be commended for working tirelessly throughout the snow season.

WHAT'S NEW IN DPW FOR FY 2013 AND FY 2014

The Department of Public Works is taking the use of technology to a new level in several of our operations. By introducing more technology in our fleet operations, we are increasing productivity and achieving savings by working smarter.

In FY 2013 DPW upgraded its fuel management system to the state-of-the-art Ward4 system, which allows real-time remote monitoring, troubleshooting, and reporting of the District's 12 fueling stations.

The new system also allows the use of automatic, reprogrammable fueling devices that will save money when vehicles are retired. These devices are compatible with all vehicles and equipment in the District's fleet and will reduce manually entered data errors, increase accountability, and track fuel usage more accurately.

More than 700 vehicles, generators, and light towers have been equipped with the new devices.

With speed, ease and accuracy DPW FMA technicians wirelessly diagnose, repair and program vehicles and equipment. The tablets allow Fleet staff to perform all programming duties themselves, taking advantage of the wireless infrastructure at the Fleet Maintenance Facility, thereby increasing productivity.

This year, we also are upgrading the tried and true FASTER system that's been in use for 19 years. By acquiring this new software, we will be better able to successfully manage the fleet through improved reporting and enhanced analytical tools.

While DPW has invested considerable resources in technology, we also continue to use processes that work, even those that date back to early Roman times. I'm speaking of composting. For years, we have composted leaves and holiday trees and provided the compost to residents for free. But we also saw an opportunity to bring Mayor Gray's Sustainable DC Plan closer to being realized by addressing the issues associated with food waste composting.

In FY 2013, the Solid Waste Management Administration implemented a four-month in-town commercial food waste acceptance and transfer pilot program to identify the operational and financial constraints of providing this service. All licensed commercial haulers in the District were invited to participate. Food waste was to be brought to the Benning Road Transfer Station.

Among the lessons learned is the need for education and quality control on the part of the business contracting for food waste disposal before it is collected. Post-consumer food waste is very likely to be contaminated. In our pilot, we had a 50% contamination rate. An acceptable contamination rate is below 10%.

We also learned that the economics of food waste composting are too expensive when compared with trash disposal, in part because there are no nearby facilities that accept food waste for composting. The closest available commercial facilities are located south of Richmond or in Delaware at the base of the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The on-going pilots in Prince George's County and Howard County are limited to County-generated materials only.

DPW solicited for this service again in FY 2014 but received no bids. At this time, we are waiting for food waste composters to establish businesses closer to the District. We are exploring other opportunities for composting.

Now, I would like to talk about a program whose popularity has swelled over the years. I'm talking about Household Hazardous Waste/E-cycling/Document Shredding, which will be offered weekly starting April 5.

Our current operation attracts 2,000 or more cars a month. By spreading out the operation, we will offer our customers more flexibility and eliminate their angst at having to wait a full month for the next opportunity to get rid of batteries, insecticide, and outdated personal documents. Shredding will continue to be provided on a monthly basis, on the first Saturday of the month.

Perhaps the only project to rival household hazardous waste in our customers' opinion is the distribution of new, free Supercans, larger recycling cans and 32-gallon trash cans. By the end

of July, we will have distributed about 76,000 Supercans, 76,000 64-gallon recycling cans, 30,000 32-gallon trash cans and 30,000 48-gallon recycling cans.

District residents have made a tremendous effort to increase the amount of material they recycle, which means we needed to provide a larger capacity container for recyclables. The larger recycling container (64-gallon can) will be distributed among households with once-a-week trash collections while the 48-gallon recycling cans will be distributed in twice-a-week trash collection neighborhoods.

Supercans will be distributed first since that's where the greatest need exists, and we expect this will take eight weeks.

We are distributing the Supercans and 64-gallon recycling cans by the day of the week for collection in reverse order. Wards 7 and 8, where collections occur on Fridays, already have received their cans and now we're distributing among our Thursday collection households. We should begin Wednesday's collection areas on March 10 and Tuesday and Monday collection areas will begin receiving their cans by the end of March,

After we distribute Supercans and 64-gallon recycling cans, we will distribute the 32-gallon trash cans and 48-gallon recycling cans in our twice-a-week collection neighborhoods.

Distributing new, larger recycling cans is important to the future of our environment. By increasing capacity for residents to recycle, the District takes a significant step toward achieving the Mayor's [Sustainable DC Plan's](#) target of diverting 80 percent of the waste stream through recycling, composting, and waste conversion.

During my tenure as DPW Director, the solid waste industry has transformed its thinking about solid waste as a commodity to be discarded to a philosophy that solid waste has value. The Department of Public Works contracted for a study that will provide a strategic roadmap for the long term solid waste management needs of the District.

The study will include the development of a quantitative planning tool to calculate the amount of air, land and water resources our current solid waste management system uses. DPW plans to use those findings to compare several alternative solid waste management strategies including source reduction, material reuse, increased recycling and refining residual materials for energy.

These data will be used in the future design of an integrated solid waste management system that returns value to the District economy in the form of jobs, localized control of materials and natural capital asset capacity.

We need public input to inform our analysis. DPW plans to conduct a public session on April 7th to further explain the study and to receive resident and interest group feedback. A final report will be delivered to DPW by the end of FY 2014.

Before concluding my comments on our solid waste administration, I want to remind motorists that residential street sweeping resumes Monday, March 10. This means you need to pay

attention to the signs and move your car when parking restrictions are enforced. We pushed the start date from March 3 to March 10 because we expect yet another snow event March 3.

Our Parking Enforcement Management Administration is enhancing its productivity through expanded use of technology and more feet on the street. While our most requested service is bulk collection appointments, stepped up parking enforcement is a close second.

DPW is hiring and training 30 parking officers. These new officers will be assigned to evening and Saturday shifts where more coverage is needed. One group has completed training and is on the street. A second group is about to begin the nine-week training program.

On the technology front, PEMA is upgrading its impound lot management system by acquiring software that will:

- Accurately track, manage and report on dispatch and lot management operations.
- Increase overall operational efficiency.
- And improve the exchange of data with other District agency systems by providing the capability to perform near-real-time transactional data sharing.

That concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer your questions.