

Brooklyn's Most Prominent Artisanal Empire Is Expanding

Daily Intel Home

It Looks Like Hurricane Sandy Is the Presidential Race's October Surprise

10/28/12 at 2:24 PM

22 Comments

Sandy Could Be a Toxic Shitstorm in Gowanus [Updated]

By ADAM PASICK



A frothy fecal mixture.

A little more than a year ago, we filed this report about what would happen if Hurricane Irene were to hit the Gowanus Canal. The canal avoided flooding by a few scant inches, but as Hurricane Sandy batters New York, a storm surge is looking even more likely, so we've updated our post from last year.

As Hurricane Sandy begins to arrive in the New York area on Sunday, the neighborhoods surrounding the Gowanus Canal are in for a literal shitstorm — and that may be the least of their problems.

The latest projections anticipate a storm surge of several feet in New York Harbor on Sunday. A deluge would travel from Upper New York Bay, through Gowanus Harbor, and into the 1.5-mile-long Gowanus Canal. Once in the canal, it could stir up a heady mix of pollutants — essentially oil, heavy metals, and human excrement — and distribute it throughout the slowly gentrifying area that sits among some of the priciest neighborhoods in Brooklyn. In Gowanus itself, a host of new restaurants and bars have opened, a developer is trying to revive plans for luxury housing along the canal banks, and a new park is set to open next year.

Update: As of 9:30 pm on Sunday night, photos posted on Twitter show the Gowanus has already begun to flood on 2nd St., with water pushing up about 15 feet before the wind and rain and storm surge have even begun to subside.

Ask any Gowanus resident, or any of the artists and restaurateurs who have recently staked out shops there; they'll tell you that it's no fun for anyone with a functioning olfactory system to be near the canal when it overflows into the canal whenever it maxes out its capacity to handle human waste, resulting in a disgusting wave of human poop. The canal can be even fouler on a sunny day, when water levels drop low enough to expose the polluted sludge — mostly 100-year-old byproducts, and PCBs from metal and paint factories — that lines its banks.

If Sandy hits with sufficient force, a flood of the human waste quaintly known as combined sewer overflow is almost a certainty. What is less certain is how much of the heavier, more dangerous contaminants will be up by the storm surge and heavy winds and deposited by the flood waters. There is a worrying precedent: Hurricane Katrina, which inundated several Superfund sites such as the Agriculture Street Landfill. The Gowanus Canal, the landfill had accumulated decades worth of various pollutants, and after Katrina the landfill showed "disturbingly high" levels of cancer-causing chemicals from soot and petroleum byproducts. Those are known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and EPA testing has confirmed high levels of PAHs in the Gowanus Canal, the result of oil and coal refinery runoff a hundred years ago.

The 50-odd blocks that surround the canal — known lately for open-air dance parties and hipster hangouts in Zone A and are subject to mandatory evacuation. The two neighborhoods that border the Gowanus

and Carroll Gardens, are both uphill from the canal. But whether those hills are steep enough to turn toxic poop won't be known until Sandy passes through.
Get more: hurricane sandy, gowanus, brooklyn

Water in Basement?

Free tips on flood-damaged heating and cooling equipment
www.ahrinet.org

Gastroenterologist in NY

Gastroenterology, Colonoscopy and all digestive diseases
www.getcolonoscopy.com

AdChoices 

From Our Partners



David Petraeus Makes 'Call of Duty' Appearance as Secretary of Defense
Ridley Scott, Partners Plan User-Generated Bruce Springsteen Documentary
BBC's 'Newsnight' Covers Its Own Woes, Broadcaster's Wider Crisis
Hugh Grant Says 'Huge' Blunder Led to BBC Crisis
'Skyfall' China Release Date Pushed to 2013

newser

READ THESE NOW MORE

Livestrong Donations Up Since Scandal Broke
Finally, at Tim Cook's Apple: Perks
Radical Cleric Leaves UK Prison



- nymag.com**
- News & Features
- Restaurants
- Bars
- Entertainment
- Fashion
- Shopping
- Agenda
- Daily Intel
- The Cut
- The Sports Section
- The Magazine

Vulture

24-hour coverage of the entertainment world.
Movies / TV / Music / Books / Art / Theater / Clickables
Grub Street & Menupages
Get restaurant menus and deals, as well as the latest food news.
BOS / CHI / DC / LA / NYC / PHI / SF / S FLA

- Jobs
- Privacy
- Terms
- About Us
- Contact Us
- Media Kit
- RSS

Newsletters

Apps

Ad choices

Copyright © 2010 2012, New York Media LLC. All Rights Reserved. Vulture® and Grub Street® are registered trademarks of New York Media LLC.