CITY OF NEW YORK / PARKS & RECREATION
INNOVATIONS
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GAS-ELECTRIC HYBRIDS ROLL INTO PARKS

Upon initial inspection, the Toyota Prius may look like any other compact car, but check out the dashboard and in the center you will see a touch-sensitive computer console that replaces the odometer and gas gauge. Then take a look under the hood, and you will notice that a shiny box labeled "Hybrid System" sits in the spot previously reserved for a gasoline engine. Fourteen 2001 Priuses are the newest additions to the Parks fleet, and they represent the cutting edge in low-emission, fuel-efficient vehicle technology. First introduced in Japan in 1997, the Prius remains the only mass-produced automatic transmission hybrid gas/electric vehicle available in the United States.

The Prius runs with separate gas and electric engines working together, automatically switching as one becomes the more efficient source of power. The electric engine is continually recharged while the Prius is in motion, converting energy that would normally be lost during stopping or coasting into battery power. This electric energy is then used to run the Prius, making it most efficient in stop-and-go city driving, and so fuel efficient in general that it can go from 500 to 600 miles on less than 12 gallons of gasoline. The Ford Taurus needs twice as much fuel to go the same distance.

A green 2001 Toyota Prius stands ready to be dispatched into the Parks fleet. Parks will have 14 Priuses in all.

Despite the Prius' unique engine set-up and superb fuel efficiency, little is sacrificed in power and comfort. Its trunk and passenger space both fall within norms for compact cars, and it can go from zero to sixty in a respectable 12.5 seconds. All of these factors make the Prius an exciting environmentally friendly and economical new option for an urban agency like Parks. ***For more information about the Prius, contact Dan "Frolic" Froehlich at (212) 360-8228. Written by Sarah "Cria" Coleman.***

SHARE YOUR INNOVATIONS!

Do you have ideas that you know would improve our Parks? If you have suggestions for this newsletter or have recently implemented an innovative idea, please contact the Parks R & D Team at (212) 360-8229.

LEARNING TO PREVENT CLOGGED CATCH BASINS

Catch basins, the large containers that sit under ground drains to catch leaves, trash, and other debris, are essential to prevent clogged pipes. But because they fill quickly, they need to be cleaned frequently, or the drains become stopped-up and overflow. Cleaning out a clogged basin is a lengthy process, and in the past, the problem was usually addressed by filing a work order request. Most of these requests are directed to Brooklyn's plumbers or forwarded to the Five-Boro sewer truck. They require substantial time to fulfill and often go uncompleted. However, Brooklyn's technical trades shop realized that if the catch basins were cleaned regularly, clogged drains could be prevented, thus eliminating the need to file a work order request. On May 11, the borough conducted a training session where plumbers taught representatives from each Brooklyn district how to clean catch basins as part of their preventative maintenance program.

Plumber Vito Marotta cleans the depths of a catch basin.

The course showed how to recognize when catch basins should be cleaned and the proper method of doing so. Participants were also taught how to remove catch basin covers, how to use the cleaning 'spoon' (a 12-foot-long wooden tool designed to scoop leaves and debris) and, most importantly, how to clean the basin safely. The session reviewed the entire cleaning process thoroughly, and each participant answered questions and took a turn using the cleaning 'spoon.'

Plumber Vito Marotta, with assistance from John Bacolo, taught the course to seventeen people at J.J. Byrne Park. Most districts chose to send their maintenance worker or fix-it person. To maximize the knowledge acquired in the training program, Brooklyn encouraged the attendees to train others in their sector in the techniques they learned.

Brooklyn is hopeful that this method of preventive maintenance will help them in their quest to reduce their work order backlog and process work orders in a more efficient manner. ***For more information about catch basin cleaning, please call KC "Jones" Sahl at (718) 965-8915. Written by KC Sahl.***

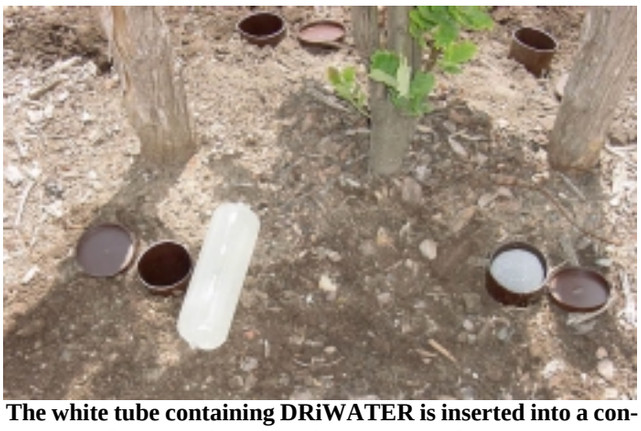
Helping Greenstreets Take Root in Staten Island

They're small, they're green, and they're popping up all over the city. Parks is working hard to reach its goal of planting 2001 Greenstreets by the end of 2001. Currently, the Parks Department is responsible for maintaining 1,422 Greenstreets, with the number likely to expand to over 1,700 in mid-June, after the spring planting season. As the number of Greenstreets increases, Parkies must find innovative ways to maintain these sites in a cost-effective manner. Maintaining these sites can be complex because it requires additional labor, equipment such as spray rigs and pick-up trucks, and safety provisions such as cones, reflective vests, and signs--because Greenstreets are often located in the middle of busy roads and intersections.

Shawn Spencer, Director of Special Projects in Staten Island, is currently overseeing a pilot project in his borough that will alleviate many of these problems using a product called DRiWATER. After reading about this product in a professional journal, Spencer contacted an agency on the West Coast that was using the product with successful results. The agency, the California Department of Transportation, reported that it had a 98% success rate using DRiWATER to maintain sites that were only being reached by work crews once every two months. Spencer thought the product might work well for Greenstreets, too, and initiated the project.

A Greenstreet on Father Capodanno Blvd. in Staten Island.

DRiWATER is time-release water bound in the form of a solid gel for watering and establishment of plant materials. This solid water slowly converts to a liquid when placed in the microbiological environment of natural soils. DRiWATER comes in a number of forms. Staten Island will be using the tube and gel pack that can be filled by a machine called the HYDRATOR. This mobile machine blends DRiWATER and food grade cellulose to form a gel that is pumped into the tubes. The tubes are placed in the soil facing the root mass of the plant or tree, where they supply up to 90 days of irrigation.


The white tube containing DRiWATER is inserted into a container in the ground; it provides irrigation for up to 90 days.

DRiWATER is ideal for maintaining Greenstreets because it disperses water at a consistent rate for an extended period of time, it does not require its own water source, and it is natural and non-toxic. Throughout the summer months, Shawn Spencer will test DRiWATER on a variety of different Greenstreets in Staten Island. He will use the tube inserts on Type 1 Greenstreets (trees and shrubs) and Type 2 Greenstreets (predominantly trees) and on sites that receive differing amounts of exposure to the elements. Using this product should cut back on the amount of labor and equipment needed to maintain Greenstreets. It promises a less time-consuming and safer way for Parks employees to water and maintain sites. If the pilot is successful, the program will expand and DRiWATER will be used citywide. ***For more information on DRiWATER, please contact Shawn Spencer at (718) 390-8030. Written by Maura "Webster" Hegarty.***

Just Say No to Painting Plastic Signs

A major effort is underway to replace all of Parks' wooden routed signs with plastic signs. These plastic signs do not require paint, and they weather better than wooden signs. Unfortunately, plastic signs attract just as much graffiti as their wooden counterparts.

It may be tempting to paint over graffiti on plastic signs, but don't do it. The signs are made out of green plastic, and it is impossible to find paint that precisely matches the plastic's appearance. Instead, use graffiti remover to wash graffiti from the plastic signs.

Routed sign with graffiti.

Borough M&O forces already use a number of graffiti removal products that will work fine on plastic signs. In addition, Parks recently began using non-toxic, soy-based graffiti removal towels called The Graffiti Genie that are made by Chemical Force Company. This product can be used to clean both wood and plastic signs. In November 2000, Parks arranged for Chemical Force to donate four containers of towels to further test them in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. The Bronx has taken steps to purchase their own stock of Graffiti Genie. ***For more information on the Graffiti Genie, contact Dan "Frolic" Froehlich at (212) 360-8223. Written by Dan Froehlich and Jeremy "Snowball" Peterson.***

City of New York
Parks & Recreation

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