Air quality safeguards are installed at filter plant

By Alisa Opar

New air quality safeguards have been put into place at the water filtration plant construction site in Van Cortlandt Park with more planned in the coming months.

The measures include retrofitting vehicles working at the site — on the Mosholu Golf Course driving range — to control emissions and installing seven air quality monitors around the project. The city Department of Environmental Protection, which runs the billion-dollar construction project, is also considering options for decreasing emissions from trucks traveling to and from the site.

The measures were discussed at the Croton Filtration Monitoring Committee meeting on Sept. 15 in Van Cortlandt Village. The committee was mandated by the state Legislature. Two of the 24 pieces of on-site equipment now have emission control devices, said Glenn Goldstein, who works for Emissar, the environmental consulting firm that specializes in mobile sources of air quality. The group was hired by the DEP. The site’s hydraulic drill rig came with a diesel oxidation catalyst; and on Sept. 9, the Caterpillar 966 Loader was outfitted with a diesel particulate filter, which will cut its pollution output by about 90 percent, Mr. Goldstein said.

Local Law 77, passed by the City Council two years ago, requires off-road construction vehicles at city construction projects to use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel or to utilize the best available technology to lower diesel particulate emissions.

The air quality monitors are being calibrated and will be up and running in a couple of weeks, said the DEP’s Gerry Kelpin.
portion of the Croton trail

By Alisa Opac

Two years ago, when the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park rediscovered a portion of trail atop the Croton Aqueduct that runs through the park’s southeast forest, it was overgrown with invasive plants.

Now, thanks to the helping hands of volunteers and funds from federal and private sources, the three-quarter-mile long extension of the Croton Aqueduct trail is getting the woodland equivalent of a facelift.

About 20 volunteers pitched in for three hours on Saturday, including 10 employees from the car company Volkswagen. They pulled invasive weeds and planted native trees and shrubs to improve the unhealthy section of forest.

Riverdalian Bernardo Diaz pitched in to keep the park “safe and clean for everyone,” he said, and brought his 14-year-old daughter Mercy, who would have come without her father, but only “if I were feeling in my vegetarian mode,” she added.

The restoration project will help residents tread through the park, which is split by the Henry Hudson Parkway and Major Deegan Expressway, said Paul Sawyer, executive director of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.

The challenge with this trail is clearing the invasive plants that choke the five-foot-wide path. Weeds that summer interns cleared a month ago regenerated and stand a foot high in the open, sunny sections of the trail. Two invasive species dominate here. Japanese knotweed has bamboo-like stems that can grow to 15 feet high and was introduced as a garden plant. Mugwort looks like a chrysanthemum and grows in dense stands, stifling native plants.

Mr. Sawyer said the hope is that by pulling out the weeds and planting native shrubs and trees, in a few years the trail will only require a cleanup once or twice a year instead of constant attention. That’s what the group did with the John Muir Trail in the northwest section of the park. “The native plants have made a real difference there in terms of health and erosion,” he said.

Another objective is to preserve a piece of the park’s history. Most people that find the trail probably don’t know they’re walking on top of the Croton Aqueduct. Mr. Sawyer said.

The trail in Vanvick is a tiny extension of the 26-mile stretch above the aqueduct designated a state park in Westchester. The Croton Aqueduct, completed in 1842, was built to provide New York City with a constant supply of clean drinking water.

The city Parks Department has also partnered with the Friends. Members of the parks’ forestry crew cut up trees that fall on the path and leave behind the tree trunks, which are used to line the trail. The park’s garbage trucks collect the mounds of trash bags volunteers pile up near the road.

Stefan Cohen contributed reporting to this story.

Elderly woman is robbed in apartment

A man and woman forced their way into an 84-year-old woman’s apartment, stealing her jewelry and $8,500 in cash last week, police said.

The victim returned to her West 234th Street apartment on Sept. 19, at 11:30 a.m., after a trip to a local store. As she entered, the couple who had been standing nearby pushed her inside and shoved her into the bedroom, telling her, “Don’t be afraid,” she told police.

Then, in the bedroom, the man pulled out a pocket knife and said, “What’s your pin number?” They did not take a credit or debit card, but in addition to the cash, they also took two rings, a watch and a necklace, police said.

The victim was not injured during the 15-minute ordeal and did not seek medical assistance.