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Navy Yard Still Recovering After Hurricane Sandy

By CRAIG GIAMMONA



Craig Giammona

The Brooklyn Navy Yard dry dock, under normal conditions, is only a few feet above sea level.

The [Kings County Distillery](#), which set up last spring in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, lost about \$4,000 worth of grain and some electronics equipment when the surge from Hurricane Sandy pushed five feet of water into the industrial park.

But it could have been worse.

More than \$800,000 worth of bourbon, aging in oak barrels on the second floor of the distillery's home at the historic Paymaster Building, survived unscathed.

"It's one thing to lose the ingredients, but [losing the whiskey] would have been a huge disaster," said Colin Spoelman, the company's co-founder and master distiller.



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There are 275 businesses at the Navy Yard, a sprawling 300-acre complex on the Brooklyn waterfront and the only section of Fort Greene located in "Zone A," the designation given to areas of New York City that are most at risk of flooding.

In the aftermath of the massive storm, the Bloomberg administration has started to examine how to prepare the city better for intense weather. The issue of protecting the city from future storms, and how to pay for projects that could cost billions, is expected to be a major issue as the 2013 mayoral race picks up steam, with tenants of the Navy Yard watching closely to see what the city does to protect the waterfront.

Shane Kavanaugh, a spokesman for the [Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation](#), which manages the site, estimated that fewer than 30 businesses there were substantially hurt by the recent storm. Prior to Sandy, 100 businesses were on a waiting list for space in the Navy Yard. It may be too early to tell if fears of future storms will drive companies away from the waterfront.

For some tenants at the Navy Yard, the storm was a mild inconvenience. [Steiner Studios](#), perhaps the most prominent tenant, did not suffer storm damage. And some of the artists who work in studios on higher floors were back in their offices the day after the storm hit.

But Sandy was harder on other businesses. [IceStone](#), which uses recycled glass to make materials for countertops, [lost valuable manufacturing equipment](#) and was without power for almost three weeks. Marketing manager Sarah Corey estimated the company's losses at \$500,000 to \$1 million. The company has been able to ship material that was ready before the storm, but it is still waiting on specialized parts to get production systems back up and running, Ms. Corey said.

IceStone has been a Navy Yards tenant for 10 years and Ms. Corey said their factory is ideally located for shipping and other logistics. Still, the storm prompted discussions within the company about leaving the low-lying industrial park.

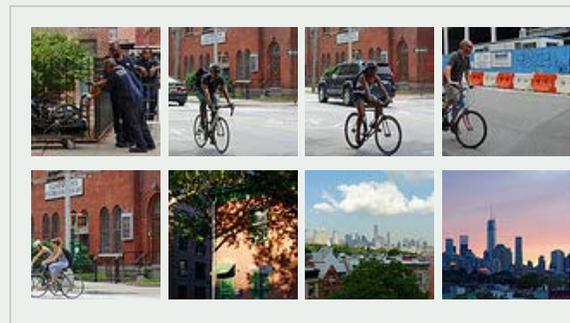
"We don't want to leave; this has been our home," Ms. Corey said. "But we need to look at solutions to prevent this type of damage in the future."

Mr. Spoelman said he and his partner floated the idea of leaving the Navy Yard, but they're not seriously considering relocation. Kings County Distillery has a 20-year lease, and took on significant debt when it expanded from a 600-square-foot space in East Williamsburg to its current home at the Navy Yard last April.

"The issue of storms is secondary to being centrally located and being kind of near the first stop in Brooklyn for people coming from Manhattan," Mr. Spoelman said. "I don't think we made the wrong choice by moving there, but there have been complications I don't think we anticipated."

One real estate source, who asked to remain anonymous because he can't speak to reporters without authorization from his company's press office, said it was too early to know how, or if Sandy will affect the waterfront real estate market in New York.

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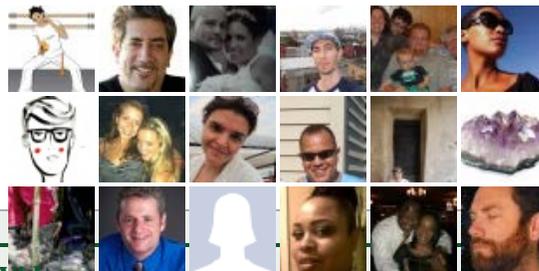
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"I would be suspicious of anyone who has an opinion this early in the game," the source said.

He said higher insurance rates, widely expected for businesses in flood-prone areas, could be secondary to operational concerns. He wondered if businesses will be leery of staying near the water or moving there when they know a storm could shut them down for days or weeks.

That's been part of the issue for IceStone, and Ms. Corey is hopeful that the city will pursue flood protection projects, like the storm surge barriers [that were recently touted by City Council Speaker Christine Quinn](#), a favorite in the 2013 mayoral race.

Professor Malcolm Bowman, an oceanographer who heads the [Storm Surge Research Group at Long Island's Stony Brook University](#), said regional storm surge barriers may be the only way to effectively protect New York City's coastal areas from major flooding. But the project could be a major undertaking, lasting 10 years at a cost upwards of \$13 billion, he said.

"It's starting to get political traction," Mr. Bowman said. "We have to stop arguing about all these things and do things to protect our cities."

Another scientist who studies storms, Philip Orton, of the [Center for Maritime Systems at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken](#), said it's too soon to say storms are becoming more frequent, or that hurricane fears will drive people away from the waterfront.

"We're not the Netherlands," Mr. Orton said. "I don't think this is a threat to the existence of New York City at all. I think we just need to do some smart things and we don't need to think of it as an existential threat to the city."

Mr. Orton supports measures like creating gates to plug tunnels and subway stations and moving key city infrastructure to higher ground.

Higher ground is a key part of Kings County Distillery's new flood plan. Next time a storm is churning toward Brooklyn, the company will move its grain to the second floor, where it should find a safe spot next to the barrels of bourbon, Mr. Spoelman said.

"We know it's going to come in if the water comes, we just have to be prepared for that," Mr. Spoelman said.

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