



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Act now to prevent basement backups later *Limit use of water prior to and during storms*

Despite the recent storm, the summer has been unusually dry. Rains are inevitable in the Chicago region, so the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is reminding residents how they can prepare for storms to prevent or minimize basement flooding and sewer backups.

The Chicago metropolitan area developed on a flood plain. During heavy rain storms, the open land was able to absorb excess water. As the region grew with construction of commercial and residential buildings and expanses of paved surfaces, the area was less able to absorb rainwater.

In the meantime, sewer systems were designed and built over 100 years ago to drain sanitary flow and a limited amount of stormwater directly to the river. Today, most of these local sewers are burdened with much more water, and intense, record-breaking storms can overwhelm the capacity of the systems and contribute to localized flooding. Too much water and sewage entering the system at the same time can lead to basement backups and flooding damage.

“Much of the Chicagoland region has combined sewer systems in which both sewage and rain travel in one pipe to the water treatment facility,” explained MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore, chair of the MWRD Stormwater Management Committee. “To accommodate rainfall accumulations, it is important that the sewer system be as empty as possible.”

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, a family of four can use 400 gallons of water every day. With over five million people living in Cook County, this adds up to substantial water usage. If each household implements measures to minimize flooding and limit water use before rain falls, sewer

systems may not reach capacity as quickly and would more efficiently move stormwater away from homes and businesses.

To avoid flooding themselves and their neighbors, there are actions residents can take now, before the rains fall. More costly options that require a licensed plumber include installing: overhead sewers; check valves in sewer traps to prevent flood waters from backing up in sewer drains; sewage backflow valves to stop sewage from reentering your home due to local sewage system backups that are caused by floods; and, pervious surfaces to absorb stormwater in place of driveways or other paved areas.

Plumbers should also inspect your home’s lateral connections for blockages or damage that could lead to basement backups.

Some low or no cost ideas include: purchasing a rain barrel from the MWRD for \$58 and connecting downspouts to the rain barrel to save the rainwater for reuse; turning water off while brushing your teeth; washing full loads of laundry or dishes at any given time; and, taking a bath instead of a shower to save significant amounts of water.

Residents can help reserve capacity in the local and intercepting sewer systems by postponing high water consumption activities up to two hours before and during a storm. Such activities include: running the dishwasher, handwashing dishes, bathing or showering, washing clothes, watering the lawn, and washing vehicles.

For additional tips, visit <http://www.mwrdd.org> or follow us at www.facebook.com/metropolitanwaterreclamationdistrict or [mwrddgc](http://www.mwrddgc.com) at www.Twitter.com.

Our water environment, take it personally

Established in 1889, the MWRD (www.mwrdd.org) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.