



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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For immediate release January 14, 2014

## MWRD year in review sets stage for 2014

As the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) rings in the new year, a look back at 2013 offers the opportunity to revisit our achievements as we forge ahead into 2014. We began the year on a bright note as the Calumet Water Reclamation plant underwent an overhaul and received an award from the American Council of Engineering Companies of Illinois. The project included the construction of 12 new primary settling tanks and eight new aerated grit tanks to replace under-sized and antiquated facilities. This award was followed by even better news as Governor Pat Quinn announced that the MWRD would receive a \$250 million low-interest loan through the Illinois Clean Water Initiative. This funding allowed us to move forward with projects crucial for improving the water environment and protecting public health.

### Responsible Fiscal Management

We continued our quest to stay on sound financial footing in 2013. The Board of Commissioners passed an ordinance directing the Cook County Clerk to reduce our tax levy for 2012 by \$19.7 million dollars. We believe residents deserve to have their hard earned dollars protected and managed properly. We also recovered additional costs of treating wastewater through a user charge imposed on certain non-residential users. The MWRD has maintained its AAA bond ratings from Fitch since 2001 and from Standard & Poor's since 2006. As in years past we received the Distinguished Budget Presentation award from the Government Finance Officers Association. In May, we released our Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). This financial audit is performed annually to ensure we are conducting business in a responsible, ethical and financially-sound manner. Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP, an independent accounting firm, presented the CAFR report during the Board's regular meeting on May 16 and stated that "the MWRD's financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the position and results of the District."

### Pursuit of Processes to Save Energy and Money

The quality of wastewater has greatly improved since the MWRD's early years. The financial costs and energy required to run the processes that treat 1.4 billion gallons of wastewater per day are substantial. In keeping with our commitment to environmental stewardship and fiscal responsibility, we are continuing our work to become an energy-neutral organization and to minimize our energy costs. We are driving down energy costs by purchasing electricity at discounted rates through a competitive auction, with solar panels and by continuing the use of sewerthermal technology, which utilizes the ambient temperature of wastewater as an energy source.

Another significant effort underway that will help us achieve this energy neutral goal is the testing of a deammonification process, called ANITA™ Mox, which is a new energy-efficient nitrogen removal process with a low carbon footprint. Based on the use of anammox bacteria, it was developed for the treatment of water rich in ammonia and poor in carbon source. We plan to cut the ribbon on this new process in June at the Egan WRP.

We are looking throughout our organization to find additional sources of energy production. A demonstration project is underway to capture the energy of falling water to produce electricity in a new application of a "pico turbine"

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at the Stickney WRP. As water proceeds from one process to another over the normal course of flow at a wastewater treatment plant, it often falls over weirs, which are used to control water surface elevation in treatment tanks, and when water falls, it releases energy. Until recently, there was no technology small enough to fit into the tanks to capture that energy. We are partnering with the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to generate electricity from flowing and falling water at wastewater treatment plants.

### **Phosphorus Removal**

In 2013, we took steps to remove phosphorus from the treatment process and convert it into a usable product. This technology will produce approximately 10,000 – 15,000 tons of fertilizer annually, and our contractor, Ostara, will purchase the product at \$400 per ton. This revenue should offset the operation costs of the facility. Robert F. Kennedy, a member of the Ostara Board of Directors, joined us during the Water Environment Federation's 86th Annual Technical Exhibition and Conference (WEFTEC) in October to announce this new pursuit. These endeavors illustrate how the MWRD is changing the way we see sewage: not as a waste product but as a resource to be recovered and reused.

### **Disinfection Groundbreaking**

Phosphorus removal is just one of the ways we are working to improve water quality. In September, we broke ground on disinfection projects at the O'Brien and Calumet Water Reclamation Plants. We were joined by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 Administrator, Susan Hedman; Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Director, Lisa Bonnett; and other area leaders in Skokie in September to help kick off the projects. The work on both plants should be completed by December 2015, ahead of the 2016 recreational season.

### **Controlling Combined Sewer Overflows and Preventing Floods**

Illinois experienced tremendous flooding in April of this year. Hundreds of homes were deemed uninhabitable and many lives were disrupted. Governor Quinn declared 44 Illinois counties federal disaster areas. While we have no control over the intensity of storm events, we can help minimize local flooding, and we see some light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to flood protection. We celebrated the "last blast" at the Thornton Reservoir in September. The Thornton Reservoir, a part of TARP, is set to come online at the same time as the disinfection facilities at the Calumet WRP, which also serves the southern area of the county. This combined effort will maximize the area's water quality and minimizing flooding.

In October, the Board approved the Cook County Watershed Management Ordinance (WMO). The ordinance provides uniform stormwater management regulations for Cook County to prevent future commercial, municipal, and residential development and redevelopment projects from exacerbating flooding. We hosted four public meetings and a study session earlier this year to offer the public the opportunity to voice their opinion regarding the proposed ordinance. The WMO incorporates comments received during both the 2009 and 2013 public review periods; results received from an Economic Impact Study; and input from the WMO Advisory Committee.

### **Partnerships**

This year we partnered with seven private and public organizations to support improvements in public access, green stormwater infrastructure, and wildlife habitat in the Chicago and Calumet region. In August, we joined our fund partners and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel at the Wrigley Global Innovation Center to announce details on \$1.1 million in competitive funding. Healthy urban waterways are a key component of the vitality of our communities. These investments improve our local economy and our quality of life. In finding new ways to deal with flooding, the Chi-Cal Rivers Fund will help reduce costs and risks associated with stormwater runoff. We also participated in two U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration unwanted medicine collections, removing more than 650 pounds of pharmaceuticals from the waste stream. In 2014, we will be moving forward with plans to partner with the City

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of Chicago Department of Water Management and Chicago Public Schools to install green infrastructure at four elementary schools. These projects will help minimize flooding by removing asphalt and replacing it with more natural means of water collection.

### **Legislative Program**

This year, Pres. Kathleen Meany, Commissioner Michael Alvarez, Chairman of the Federal Legislative Committee, and Executive Director David St. Pierre traveled to Washington D.C. to secure federal funding needed to keep the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) on schedule. Despite a difficult budget year and economical challenges, our Illinois delegation, led by Senator Richard Durbin, understood the need for this project to move forward and made it a priority to push for the funding necessary to do so. With their help, the MWRD received \$35 million dollars and ensured that TARP would be funded in 2014. The entire Board of Commissioners also traveled to Springfield to meet with members of the Illinois General Assembly to discuss legislative initiatives and new ideas in protecting our regional waterways. Our long time partnership with our state and federal legislators has helped MWRD to succeed in its mission, and our continued work together will guarantee efficient progress in our area's water protection.

### **First Sustainability Summit**

With a goal of empowering community leaders with an awareness of local, state and federal resources and partnerships, we hosted our first Sustainability Summit in Midlothian in September. More than 80 officials from the 125 Cook County communities participated in the four hour summit held at the Raday Lodge. Speakers included representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, the Office of the Governor, the Illinois State Treasurer's office, Cook County, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Openlands, and the MWRD.

### **Vendor Outreach**

Vital to our success is the work of our vendors. Over 200 contractors, consultants, subcontractors, and potential vendors had the opportunity to network in the hope of finding new business at our second vendor outreach event held at the University of Illinois at Chicago in August. In addition to MWRD staff, other community organizations and businesses facilitated roundtable discussions to learn from or educate others about potential contract opportunities.

### **Technical Advancements**

We have come a long way in 125 years. Since the MWRD was first established, horse and buggies have been replaced with cars and buses, gas lamps were replaced with electric lights, and our drinking water is reliably clean and sanitized. Thanks to technology, those interested in the debate and proceedings of those early formative years, as well as all the years in between, can visit the MWRD website and read the minutes with the click of a button and the help of a new searchable database. The public can even watch Board meetings from the comfort of their own home now that we stream the meetings online and archive the video. In addition, the state of the art facilities and processes that can be found at our facilities continue to attract visitors from all over the world.

The treatment technologies and processes we are pursuing today are cutting edge and will completely transform the wastewater industry for years to come. The work we are doing today will be a significant triumph as the MWRD's story is told 125 years from now.

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**Our Water Environment: Take it personally.**