



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago President's Annual Message 2014



Kathleen Therese Meany
*President of the Board of
Commissioners*

My term as President has come to a close, and I will look back on my 26 years as both an employee and as a commissioner fondly.

Consent Decree Lodged

This year was the District's 125th Anniversary, and we kicked off the year with long-awaited news from the United States District Court.

Judge George M. Marovich approved and entered the consent decree on Jan. 6 between the US EPA, the Illinois EPA and the District which provides targeted completion dates for our long-term control plan, namely the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP) Thornton and McCook reservoirs. TARP will result in a significant decrease in the volume of water discharged to the waterways from combined sewer overflows in Cook County, along with dramatically reducing the potential for flooding. The District is committed to executing this work as quickly as possible.

Legislative Achievements

Our two major legislative initiatives were unanimously passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Pat Quinn. House Bill 3912 authorizes the District to acquire flood-prone properties and to proceed with local stormwater projects where previously only regional projects were authorized. These two new tools will allow us to provide needed flood relief to Cook County residents. We are especially

grateful to Representative Elaine Nekritz and Senator Daniel Biss who carried this bill forward in their respective chambers. In 2004, the District assumed responsibility for stormwater management in Cook County, and since then, over \$300 million in regional stormwater projects are underway. These projects will yield over \$400 million in benefits. We have also been accepting applications from communities on behalf of interested homeowners who have experienced multiple flooding events. We will begin purchasing properties to be demolished and turned over to appropriate government agencies.

WMO/I&I

The District also addressed flood management through other means. To prevent future commercial, municipal, and residential development and redevelopment projects from exacerbating flooding, the Board approved the Watershed Management Ordinance in 2013 which provides uniform stormwater management regulations for Cook County. The WMO took effect on May 1, 2014. We also made progress with addressing infiltration and inflow by creating a new program to continue to reduce sanitary sewer overflows, basement backups and extraneous flows to our water reclamation plants.

Resource Recovery

Phosphorus

Phosphorus is a non-renewable resource needed for life to exist. However, too much in the environment can impair water quality and harm aquatic life. In July, Governor Quinn signed legislation allowing the District to recover valuable resources in used water, and he later announced that he would provide \$124 million in IL Clean Water Initiative funds for a new

phosphorus recovery facility. The process will transform phosphorus and nitrogen recovered from municipal and industrial wastewater into a high-value, eco-friendly fertilizer. To further reduce phosphorus levels in the waterways, staff reached out to commercial and industrial users interested in voluntarily reducing such levels from their waste streams; we will be assisting organizations in identifying how they may be able to divert their high-strength waste phosphorus to the new recovery system.

Biosolids

Biosolids, which are the nutrient-rich, organic material developed through the extensive wastewater treatment process, will also be maximized under this new law as the District explores opportunities to reuse water, market biosolids and recover other valuable commodities. Our staff has the expertise and experience needed to capture and beneficially reuse recovered resources. Not only will this transformation reduce landfill usage, but we will also see a reduction in greenhouse gases and in our carbon footprint. These processes are good for the environment, good for the economy and good for the consumer.

Wood chips mulch blend

The District signed an IGA with the City of Chicago to accept tree debris which is being mixed with biosolids and composted into an organic material for use as a substitute for fertilizer, compost and soil amendment. This material will be used for maintaining or establishing turf grass in parks, athletic fields and public access areas throughout Cook County. The City will provide the District with approximately 150,000 yards of wood chips over the next three years.

Maggie Daley Park

Commissioners were on hand as the first truckloads of biosolids were delivered to the future Maggie Daley Park in downtown Chicago this summer. The biosolids are mixed with soil prior to application to improve the quality of the fields. The Park's total acreage is 25.2 acres, of which 16.9 acres will serve as a green roof to parking facilities. This will be the second largest green roof in the country, second only to Millennium Park.

Biosolids Permit Modification

The Illinois EPA modified the District's biosolids permit to now allow use of exceptional quality biosolids on food crops and lawns. Staff are currently developing a distribution method.

Wastewater Treatment

The District's core mission is to provide wastewater treatment for more than five million people living and working in Cook County. That work is strictly scrutinized and requires the monitoring, testing and the evaluation of hundreds of water samples on any given day, and a flaw in any one could affect a perfect score. Five of our treatment facilities once again achieved perfect scores on annual reports to earn the National Association of Clean Water Agencies' (NACWA) highest honor, the Platinum Peak Performance awards. These awards recognize exceptional performance under National Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements and federal Clean Water Act standards. The MWRD has received platinum peak performance honors for up to 22 consecutive years of 100 percent compliance.

NACWA Management Award

The District also received the highest management award level offered by NACWA this summer. The award represents "outstanding dedication to the implementation of sustainable, successful programs that exemplify the attributes of an effectively managed utility." The District's work met or exceeded numerous attributes of utility excellence. Executive Director David St. Pierre accepted the award on behalf of the MWRD during NACWA's summer conference and 44th annual meeting in Portland, Oregon.

125th Anniversary Celebrations

In 2014, we opened the doors to our facilities to celebrate our 125th anniversary. In June, more than 350 residents from the city of Lockport and surrounding communities toured the Lockport Powerhouse during Old Canal Days. We participated in 10 community parades this year and for the first time we hosted open houses at six of our plants in conjunction with a nationwide Water Works campaign in September.

Hundreds of members of the public stopped by the plants to see our operations and learn more about the infrastructure required to treat wastewater for more than five million residents of Cook County.

Space to Grow Partnership

The District partnered with the Chicago Public Schools, City of Chicago Department of Water, Openlands and Healthy Schools Campaign on the Space to Grow project. This work is transforming four Chicago school grounds into green spaces that will improve student health. We participated in ribbon cuttings on the four schoolyards in October: Grissom School, Leland, Morrill School, and Schmid School. All four yards had been covered with impervious asphalt surfaces and now have rain gardens and other features that collect rainwater to help stop basement flooding and prevent pollution from flowing into the Chicago Area Waterways. In October, we approved at least 30 more schools to undergo similar transformations. It will be nice to see the happy faces of all of the children playing on their new spaces in the coming years while learning about stormwater management.

Congressman Quigley Visits

Congressman Mike Quigley served as “treatment plant operator for the day” at the Stickney WRP in January. Congressman Quigley raked down the dumpsters in the West Side Coarse Screen Building and piloted the solids train from Stickney WRP to the Lawndale Avenue Solids Management Area where he unloaded a full load of biosolids into the lagoon. Congressman Quigley, along with the rest of our congressional delegation, are great champions of the environment and Illinois. They continue to support TARP and other environmental and life quality efforts in Cook County. We appreciate Congressman Quigley’s interest in our day to day activities that protect the health and welfare of our region. The tasks we perform are not always glamorous but they are essential for the well being of our constituents.

Water Works Rally in Washington, DC

The District took part in a survey of 30 water utilities nationwide, and this study culminated in water sector leaders from across the country meeting in Washing-

ton, DC in September to invite congressional leaders to partner in strengthening the nation’s water infrastructure. David and I met with our delegation about the importance of the water sector as the District and the City of Chicago will support 290,000 annual jobs and produce \$524 billion in economic output over the next decade.

Disparity Study

The District was the first area agency to institute an Affirmative Action ordinance in 1977. The current ordinance expired on Dec. 6, 2014, so we conducted a Disparity Study of the District’s Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Program for our construction and construction-related professional service contracts to ensure that this critical program remains successful. More than 80 women and minority-owned business contractors and subcontractors participated in a public study session convened in July. Colette Holt & Associates reviewed program eligibility criteria, certification and program implementation policies to develop findings and new goals.

GFOA

The District accurately communicates its financial story to the public every year and again received awards for financial reporting excellence from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) of the United States and Canada. In March, Steven Gauthier, Director of the Technical Services Center for the GFOA, presented four distinguished awards for financial reporting excellence for 2012 and 2013:

- The Distinguished Budget Presentation Award was presented for the 29th consecutive year;
- The Certificate of Achievement of Excellence in Financial Reporting was awarded for the 38th consecutive year which puts the MWRD in the top two percent of governments receiving a consecutive award in this category;
- The MWRD Retirement Fund received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 20th consecutive year; and,
- The MWRD Retiree Health Care Trust received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 6th consecutive year.

As the highest form of recognition in the areas of budgeting, accounting and financial reporting by state and local government, the GFOA certificates provide assurance to the MWRD Board and management, investors, regulators, rating agencies, and the public that the MWRD's financial condition and results of operations are fully and fairly presented. The GFOA awards are an independent attestation of the District's prudent fiscal management.

Soil in the City and Sustainability Summit

In conjunction with the US Department of Agriculture and Illinois Water Environment Association, the District co-hosted the internationally-renowned "Soil in the City" conference to provide the opportunity to share ideas for new uses for deindustrialized land. This conference was held at the Allerton Hotel in Chicago and was followed by the second annual Sustainability Summit. We presented four organizations with recycled glass awards for their sustainable efforts. Evanston High School and the Chicago Park District received the 2014 Biosolids Beneficial Reuse awards, and the Village of Franklin Park and Historic Chicago Bungalow Assoc. received awards for their sustainable achievements in building construction, landscaping and community outreach.

Improving the Water Environment

Incident Reporting App

As part of our ongoing effort to protect our water environment, our IT Department released an on-line incident reporting application in May and a mobile Incident Reporting application for Apple iOS devices in September. The new app allows users to submit instances of odors and other environmental-related issues.

Household Hazardous Waste, Unwanted Medicine collections

The District hosted two unwanted medicine collections at the Calumet, Stickney and O'Brien plants, and hundreds of pounds of pharmaceuticals were removed from the waste stream. We also partnered with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Moraine Valley Community College to collect household hazardous waste.

Staff celebrations

We celebrated African American History Month during a special event held in the Board Room in February. In March, we celebrated Women's History Month and heard wonderful speeches from Manju Sharma, Director of Maintenance and Operations; Pam Ball, electrical foreman; and Toni Glymph, senior environmental microbiologist. In May, we celebrated the retirement of 70 staff members. We wish them all the best.

In June, David delivered the keynote address to a sold out crowd of 330 at the City Club of Chicago. He spoke about the District's accomplishments over the past 125 years and how we are the leading environmental agency. While the District has won numerous awards for our work, we are not going to rest. As the District continues to forge ahead in our second century, we are proud of being the leading wastewater treatment agency in the country.

As the industry evolves, we are using emerging technologies and processes to support our mission, our customers and our water environment. We are pursuing sustainable practices, embracing partnerships and implementing available technologies while working together with communities to eliminate flooding. The work we started in 1889 made the Chicago region habitable. The cutting edge work we are pursuing today will continue to transform and shape the wastewater industry in the future. I am happy to have played a role in the agency's transformation. During my 26 years at the District, I have been witness to extraordinary engineering feats and capital projects, milestones such as our 100th and 125th anniversary, and countless dedicated employees who continue to move our agency forward as leaders in the wastewater and stormwater industry. I have been honored to serve and will look on with pride whenever I visit the beautiful garden dedicated in my honor at the Stickney plant.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen Therese Meany

President of the Board of Commissioners