



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Legislation curbs water pollution through nutrient trading program

Second bill protects survivor's pension benefits in wake of new laws



Each bag of Crystal Green shelved at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago's Stickney Water Reclamation Plant represents a ton of fertilizer that is produced as result of the phosphorus and nitrogen extracted from the wastewater treatment process. The environmentally friendly fertilizer is then marketed and sold at hardware stores to provide a return to taxpayers. It also provides a benefit to the regional and national water environment by reducing the nutrients that formerly ended up in these waterways.

Legislation signed by Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner and supported by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) will develop new strategies to reduce nutrients that harm waterways.

House Bill 659, sponsored by State Rep. Elaine Nekritz (57th) and State Sen. Bill Cunningham (18th), will allow the MWRD to participate in a nutrient trading program throughout Illinois to meet water quality standards, in the event that nutrient trading becomes available in Illinois.

"We thank Leader Nekritz, Senator Cunningham and all members of the Illinois General Assembly who unanimously voted for HB 659 along with Governor Rauner for embracing this initiative and partnering with us in our pledge to protect our water environment," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "This proposed legislation has allowed us the opportunity to think outside the box in our approach to pollution in our waterways. Through nutrient trading, we can expand our reach and explore a natural and cost-effective solution to address nutrient loss."



Reducing nutrients from waterways is a huge challenge, but new technology at the MWRD's Stickney Water Reclamation Plant has the capability to recover up to 85 percent of the phosphorus from wastewater streams before it accumulates as struvite in pipes and equipment. Crystal Green is the first continuous release granular fertilizer to provide root-activated phosphorus, nitrogen and magnesium. This innovation helps the MWRD meet increasingly stringent discharge limits while recovering a valuable source of phosphorus for beneficial use. The MWRD has the production capacity to potentially produce 10,000 tons per year, enough to grow 1 billion pounds of potatoes or 250 million bags of potato chips.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, nutrient trading is a market-based approach providing economic incentives for voluntary pollutant reductions from point and nonpoint sources of pollution to improve and preserve water quality. Nutrient trading allows farmers, foresters, businesses and other organizations to reduce pollution more than is legally required and to sell or trade such additional reductions as credits to other businesses, facilities, and local municipalities so they can meet their reduction requirement. Exchanging credits between various sources can provide greater efficiency in achieving water quality goals in the Illinois River. Trading can allow one source to meet its regulatory obligations by using pollutant reductions created by another source with lower pollution controls.

Point sources, like water reclamation plants (WRPs), currently account for 16 percent of total nitrogen and 48 percent of the state's phosphorus sources. Nonpoint sources (*continued*)

Legislation curbs water pollution through nutrient trading *(continued)*

like agricultural runoff account for 83 percent of total nitrogen and 49 percent of agriculture and urban runoff accounts for one percent of total nitrogen and three percent of total phosphorus. Nutrient trading will allow the MWRD to focus on a statewide scale in solving the systemic problems instead of being limited to local problems. The MWRD has already been examining many options in reducing nutrient loss downstate at its research agricultural site in Fulton County and working with the farming community to address the issue.

The MWRD is considered a national leader in nutrient recovery, having unveiled the world's largest nutrient recovery facility at its Stickney WRP in 2016. The MWRD's nutrient recovery facility will greatly reduce its nutrient effluent load to the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) thereby improving water quality in the CAWS. The facility recovers phosphorus and nitrogen to create a high value alternative to fertilizer. The MWRD has the ability to recover up to 10,000 tons of phosphorus per year. By removing phosphorus from the water and returning it to farmers and other agricultural producers, this facility represents a significant shift in the wastewater industry from treatment to recovery for reuse.

In other legislation backed by the MWRD, House Bill 164 will bring MWRD survivor pension benefits into accord with the Illinois Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act. Prior to the passage of that act in 2011, same-sex couples could not legally marry, excluding certain MWRD retirees and their spouses from full access to retirement benefits. House Bill 164 provides these retirees with access to all pension benefits made available by the MWRD's Retirement Fund to married retirees and their spouses. The legislation signed by Governor Rauner was narrowly tailored in close consultation with the MWRD's Retirement Fund and only applies to annuitants who retired prior to June 1, 2011 and received a spousal refund at the time of their separation from service. State Rep. Gregory Harris (13th) and State Sen. Iris Y. Martinez (20th) were chief sponsors of this legislation.

"HB 164 is a small update to the MWRD's retirement benefits, but is a major victory for our affected retirees," said MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore. "Most importantly, it ensures that both their service to the MWRD and their civil rights are properly recognized. We thank Governor Rauner and the members of the Illinois General Assembly for their work on this important piece of legislation."

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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