



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## 94th Annual Water Environment Federation's Technical Exhibition and Conference (WEFTEC) welcomes 10,000 to McCormick Place



President Kari K. Steele welcomed water leaders to Chicago.



Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos was presented with the Water Environment Federation's 2021 Public Officials Award at WEFTEC at McCormick Place.

A sign of normalcy and continued commitment to water quality, thousands of water professionals descended on Chicago to participate in an international conference to empower the minds behind protecting the world's water resources.

An estimated 10,000 water experts met in person for the first time in two years, convening at Chicago's McCormick Place for the 94th Annual Water Environment Federation's Technical Exhibition and Conference (WEFTEC). Masked and vaccinated, water stewards from across the globe came to Chicago to exchange knowledge, engage the community, celebrate industry achievements

and learn about the latest innovations to help protect the water environment.

"What a thrill it was to welcome water professionals from across the globe to the shores of Lake Michigan at WEFTEC," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "This year's WEFTEC was particularly gratifying to see the conference return in person with thousands of water professionals engaged and playing a part in protecting our water environment. This gives us pride in our essential work and hope for a resilient future." President Steele kicked off the conference by joining students and young professionals at the *(continued)*

## 94th Annual WEFTEC welcomes 10,000 to McCormick Place, *cont.*



(L-R) Commissioner Eira L. Corral Sepulveda and Senior Environmental Research Scientist Fenghua Yang



(L-R) Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet and WEFTEC Emcee and Keynote Speaker Laura Schwarz



(L-R) Public Affairs Specialist Pat Thomas, Commissioner Debra Shore, Public & Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Allison Fore and former General Superintendent Richard Lanyon



Executive Director Brian A. Perkovich, right, served on a WEFTEC panel.

WEFTEC community service project at the 12th St. Beach in Chicago. She helped plant native marram grass, which grows in sand and prevents erosion. MWRD Commissioners Kim Du Buclet, Debra Shore, Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda and Mariyana Spyropoulos, staff and retirees also explored the conference, exhibits and technology, learning innovative, sustainable and efficient ways to manage and improve water resources.

“As a first-time WEFTEC attendee, I was impressed by how the conference delivered such an abundance of information in just a few short days!” said Commissioner Corral Sepúlveda. “Tuning into sessions by water sector leaders from across the world, my team and I learned about topics ranging from equitable policies to

data collection strategies to pathogen behavior in wastewater systems. WEFTEC is an incredibly valuable resource to those of us at the MWRD, as it gives us the opportunity to connect with each other and other field experts about our successes, challenges, and anticipated outlooks.”

Over five days of events, meetings and presentations, the MWRD learned from partners on new approaches to climate change and storm-water management, emerging contaminants, resource recovery and leveraging data to streamline treatment processes and improve water quality. MWRD staff gave talks on utility management in the pandemic, resource recovery and biosolids land application, real-time water quality monitoring in waterways and communicating (*continued*)

## 94th Annual WEFTEC welcomes 10,000 to McCormick Place, *cont.*

to the public in virtual forums in the pandemic.

Some other highlights include:

- President Steele welcomed water leaders to Chicago at the WEF Learning Exchange for Public Officials with Commissioner Spyropoulos to discuss COVID-19 and emerging issues in the water industry.
- Executive Director Brian Perkovich participated on a panel with other utility leaders from New York, Washington, D.C. and northeast Ohio on how the MWRD has navigated through the pandemic to deliver its essential services.
- Treatment Plant Operator III Jane Schipma and Chairman of Finance Marcelino Garcia's Aide Joanne So Young Dill graduated from the Water Leadership Institute (WLI) Class of 2021, which included 54 water professionals representing 29 states, Canada, and New Zealand. The WLI program is aimed at educating and training emerging leaders and providing them with opportunities to build strong, lasting relationships within the water sector.
- Senior Environmental Soil Scientist Theresa Johnston informed and inspired audiences on the MWRD's award-winning biosolids program and how land applications are sequestering carbon, growing sunflowers and turning brownfields into vibrant green spaces.
- Principal Environmental Scientist Tom Minarik discussed real-time water quality monitoring in urban waterways through H2NOW-Chicago.org with partners from Current Chicago and Northwestern University.
- MWRD Senior Environmental Research Scientist Fenghua Yang was named chair of the 2022 WEF Leaders Innovation Forum for Technology (LIFT) Intelligent Water System Challenge. In 2019, she led an MWRD team to second place in the competition.



(L-R) Director of Monitoring & Research Ed Podczewinski, Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos, Principal Environmental Scientist Tom Minarik and Environmental Monitoring & Research Manager Albert Cox

- Public Affairs Specialist Justin Brown joined experts from the Rogue Water Lab, Rafterlis, Pinellas County, Florida, and the Water Tower in Gwinnett County, Georgia, to discuss how water agencies pivoted to conduct outreach and communicate virtually during the pandemic.

The MWRD also took home some major awards:

- The highlight of the conference was Commissioner Spyropoulos receiving WEF's Public Officials Award from WEF President Lynn Broadus.
- The MWRD was also honored as a platinum-certified agency through WEF's National Biosolids Partnership program for its work developing a renowned resource recovery program that is turning biosolids into a popular and effective soil amendment.
- Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Allison Fore was presented with the Public Communication and Outreach Program award for 2020 by WEF Past President Jackie Jarrell.

We look forward to in-person WEFTEC 2022 next year in New Orleans.

### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***