



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwr.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

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National Environmental Achievement Award honors MWRD for animation chronicling critical water reclamation process

A colorful animation that swirls a group of curious and brave explorers down the toilet, and then submerges them through the pipes, sewers and water reclamation process for a dynamic learning experience has won the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) a coveted national award.

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) presented a National Environmental Achievement Award for Public Information and Education Video to the MWRD for its “Where Does IT Go?” animation during NACWA’s 2022 Winter Conference. The animation is available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Polish and can be viewed at [youtube.com/c/metropolitanwaterreclamationdistrict](https://www.youtube.com/c/metropolitanwaterreclamationdistrict). To learn more or read the book, visit: <https://mwr.org/where-does-it-go>.

“We love our new animation and children’s book, “Where Does IT Go?” and commend staff for having the foresight and talents to connect with younger audiences to highlight the importance of our work and encourage stewardship for our water environment and careers in water and STEM fields,” said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan. “The book and animation can teach audiences of all ages the value of our shared commitment to protect our water environment.”

The project was developed in-house; animation was created by graphic artist Mary Bowers who also created the illustrations for the storybook; it was written



The MWRD’s “Where Does IT Go?” animation explores the wastewater treatment process and teaches students the importance of protecting the water environment and careers in water and STEM fields.

by Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Allison Fore, Senior Public Affairs Specialist Shelia Porter, Public Affairs Specialist Rebecca Wooley, and adapted from a PowerPoint presentation created by Public Affairs Specialist Justin Brown. The book has been distributed for free to thousands of students throughout Cook County. Despite the pandemic, the MWRD production went forward, coordinating the work of voice actors, sound effects, and a soundtrack while interspersing video and photos that range from the late 19th century to current MWRD drone footage.

Although the book was designed for students in grades four and up, the animation reaches audiences of all ages. The storybook introduces the Water Science Explorers, a cast of fictional students who answer the *(continued)*

National Environmental Achievement Award honors MWRD, *cont.*

age-old question of what happens when they flush the toilet. They embark on a special mission to discover the mystery of where it all goes and how it is cleaned.

“Community education is a critical component of our work at the MWRD. The more attention we can pay toward what flows down our drains at home and in our streets, the more productive our work will be in protecting our water environment, treating the region’s wastewater and managing stormwater,” said MWRD Commissioner Marcelino Garcia. “We thank NACWA for recognizing our animation and thank our staff who work 24/7/365.”

Incorporating lessons learned from interacting with students and working among various MWRD departments, the MWRD team created a script that explains its essential services transforming water, recovering resources and protecting the environment for 5.16 million residents. The MWRD can treat more than 2 billion gallons of water per day for Chicago and 128 communities across nearly all of Cook County. The MWRD also protects the region’s waterways and source of drinking water in Lake Michigan, while also protecting homes and businesses from flooding. The MWRD owns and operates 560 miles of intercepting sewers and force mains, 23 pumping stations, 34 stormwater de-

tention reservoirs and controls 76.1 miles of navigable waterways. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the MWRD has utilized its comprehensive collection and sampling processes to aid research partners and public health departments in detecting the COVID-19 virus in sewers.

“Despite the many challenges and setbacks that we faced as a nation and a global community over the last two years, these NACWA member public utilities have been able to deliver consistent and reliable clean water services. The herculean efforts by the staff and leadership of the over 300 utilities that comprise NACWA’s membership cannot be overstated, particularly their work as front line environmental first responders. Truly, America’s public clean water utilities held steadfast in their commitment to serve and inspire their communities throughout the course of the pandemic,” said Adam Krantz, Chief Executive Officer, NACWA. “To that end, it is NACWA’s great honor to bestow this year’s National Environmental Achievement Awards to these extraordinary member clean water utilities and individuals. Collectively, they represent the forward-thinking and civic-minded environmental stewardship that is the hallmark of today’s public water sector utilities. Congratulations!”

Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.