



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## MWRD adopts new environmental justice policy to promote diversity, equity and inclusion

The Board of Commissioners for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) has adopted a new environmental justice policy promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in its wide-ranging work to protect the regional water environment.

The objective of the policy is to integrate environmental justice considerations into all MWRD programs, policies and activities wherever possible. Commissioners formally adopted the policy on Jan. 19, following a public comment period. The policy can be viewed [here](#) or by visiting [mwr.org/real-estate-0](http://mwr.org/real-estate-0) and clicking on MWRD Real Estate Documents where the new policy has been integrated through its [updated land use criteria](#).

“We are proud to adopt this ambitious yet critically important policy that will protect all people and environments throughout our service area and beyond to where our water flows,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “I thank my colleagues on the Board of Commissioners and staff for pushing for this policy and developing it into a plan we can all support.”

The new policy advances the MWRD’s five-year Strategic Plan, which identifies one of its five goals under the category of enterprise resilience, striving to “achieve climate change and environmental justice protections.” This goal ensures that the MWRD’s essential services are reliable, equitable and cost-effective, while also achieving climate change and environmental justice protections, preparing the MWRD for manmade and natural events, and strengthening the MWRD’s operational and financial positions.

The MWRD adopted a framework for environmental justice based on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) definition. Environmental justice



*Water lacks boundaries. Just as the South Branch of the Chicago River meanders through a diverse collection of communities connected by water, the MWRD is also seeking to serve these communities and the water equitably to ensure the environment and public health is protected across land and water.*

represents the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies,” according to the EPA. The MWRD plans to expand access to MWRD resources, present alternatives to communities impacted by adverse conditions, address instances of pollution and water quality issues impacting minority and/or low-income populations, monitor and track its work, identify barriers and offer additional outreach and technical assistance.

“While the MWRD already strives to fulfill the goals of environmental justice, this policy reaffirms that commitment and sets forth best practices to better serve our taxpayers and protect the environment,” said MWRD Chairman of Finance Marcelino Garcia. “We are grateful for the public comments we have received and the support for environmental justice *(continued)*

## MWRD adopts new environmental justice policy, *cont.*

practices throughout the world that have gone before us and will continue into the future.”

The MWRD created its first environmental justice section in 2022. The section coordinates existing and future environmental justice and climate justice activities within the MWRD and in the communities that the MWRD serves by establishing partnerships with both local government and community groups within the identified communities. The MWRD environmental justice employees address flood mitigation and increasing green infrastructure in all MWRD communities, focusing on impacts to environmental justice areas. They also attend community and governmental meetings to incorporate public responses throughout environmental justice project design and construction.

The MWRD has more than 130 years of experience protecting the health and safety of Chicago area citi-

zens and their water environment. The MWRD serves a diverse population of 5.19 million residents living across 882 square miles of Cook County, including Chicago and 128 surrounding suburbs and works around the clock to transform wastewater into clean water, manage stormwater to mitigate flooding, recover sustainable resources, protect the quality of resurgent local waterways and Lake Michigan, and engage with the communities it serves as a responsive neighbor and inclusive business partner.

A leader in diversity, equity and inclusion, the MWRD was one of the first local agencies to implement an affirmative action ordinance, dating back to 1978, striving to ensure fair business practices and contracting opportunities for all. The Board of the LGBT Chamber of Commerce of Illinois also honored the MWRD with the 2021 Supplier Diversity Advocate of the Year award.

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### ***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](http://mwrld.org).*