



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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12 ways to improve our water environment on 12-12-12

December 12, 2012 offers the perfect opportunity for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) to provide a list of the top 12 ways to improve our water environment.

- 1. Minimize the use of water before and during rain storms.** Most of the region has a combined sewer system, which means the same pipes carry wastewater and stormwater to MWRD's treatment facilities. When the system becomes overwhelmed, whether from sewage or rain water, flooding may result. This is why it is important that the underground pipes remain as empty as possible before rains fall.
- 2. Dispose of unwanted pharmaceuticals in an environmentally-friendly manner.** Sewage treatment facilities are not designed to process medications that have been flushed or poured down drains. Instead, seek out organized pharmaceutical collection programs where unwanted over-the-counter and prescription medications can be properly disposed.
- 3. Pick up pet waste.** In addition to serving as a food source for rats and other disease-spreading pests, the waste contains organic matter and bacteria which can make its way to our waterways and threaten human health and wildlife. It only takes a moment to secure the waste in a bag and discard it into the garbage.
- 4. Discard or recycle litter.** It is important that inlets leading to the sewers remain free of debris in order to prevent flooding.
- 5. Pick up lawn waste.** Grass clippings, leaves, flowers, twigs, brush and tree limbs can block sewers, clog drains and cause area flooding. The drainage system is designed to carry storm water away from neighborhoods, so blowing or raking leaves into the street is a major cause of blockages in the system.
- 6. Disconnect downspouts.** Incorporate green infrastructure stormwater controls to help minimize flooding and reduce the amount of water running into sewers. Some green infrastructure examples include: establishing a rain garden, buying and setting up a rain barrel, or installing pavement composed of recycled, porous material to help water filter into the ground.
- 7. Service your lateral sewer regularly and repair when necessary.** Laterals are the sewer pipes that connect indoor plumbing to the main sewer, and they are at risk from root intrusion and corrosion. As a result, it is important to properly maintain and repair laterals.
- 8. Encourage your community to take advantage of the MWRD's free biosolids.** These nutrient-rich, organic materials are developed through extensive treatment processes. Biosolids are a superior, yet less expensive alternative to chemical fertilizer and can be used in landscaping, for turf at parks and athletic fields and for agricultural crops.
- 9. Don't use plastic bags.** It takes hundreds of years for just one plastic bag to decompose as they are produced from low density polyethylene which does not degrade. The bags are often found in waterways, and in addition to being unsightly, they can clog drainage systems and contribute to flooding and are a hazard for birds and fish.
- 10. Participate in a neighborhood waterway cleanup.** Whether by land or by boat, opportunities abound for participating in organized cleanup activities.
- 11. Learn what happens after the flush.** Take a complimentary tour of an MWRD water reclamation plant to see the wastewater treatment process unfold.
- 12. Conserve water.** It is a precious commodity that should not be wasted. When washing your hands or brushing your teeth, turn the water off until needed. Fill washing machines and dishwashers completely before starting the laundry or dish washing cycles. If you are washing dishes by hand, turn the water off while rinsing and instead, fill one sink with rinse water.

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