



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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April Overflow Action Month to Help the Chicago River

Friends of the Chicago River



On Friday, March 31, Friends of the Chicago River declared April as Overflow Action Month initiating a 30 day campaign to engage people in water conservation activities to help the Chicago River. Ranging from sharing “How To” tips for water conservation at home to taking the Overflow Action Pledge to joining a virtual happy hour with water-friendly beverages, Overflow Action activities are intended to expand the number of people participating in Overflow Action Days. This initiative was launched last year to conserve and protect clean, fresh water and reduce pollution to the river.

“The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) says that just .33” of rain can cause a combined sewer overflow to the river which is harmful to people and wildlife,” said Margaret Frisbie, Friends’ executive director, “and stormwater pollution can be just as bad. Our goal with Overflow Action Days is to educate people about that impact and teach them how they can help reduce the possibility. Overflow Action Days, like Ozone Action Days, are an excellent reminder that there is action you can take.”

To date a host of partners have signed on, including the Center for Neighborhood Technology/Rain Ready, League of Women Voters, Midwest Grows Green, MWRD, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Openlands, Patagonia, Recovery on Water, River North Residents Association, Riverbank Neighbors, Shedd Aquarium, USEPA/Water Sense and hundreds of people have taken the Overflow Action Day pledge.

“Thanks to environmental laws, restoration work, and changes to wastewater management, the Chicago River’s water quality has improved dramatically in recent years. But we can’t take this progress for granted, especially in our current political climate,” U.S. Senator Dick Durbin said. “A safe and healthy waterway is an environmental and economic benefit. I am proud to join Friends of the Chicago River for Overflow Action Month to help keep the river free from pollution and available for all to enjoy.”

Despite the massive improvements to water quality due to the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan, wastewater disinfection, and the increasing use of green infrastructure, the Chicago River is still subject to combined sewer overflows and stormwater runoff. This pollution can be minimized if we reduce the amount of water that goes into our sewer pipes from our homes and capture stormwater where it falls. Overflow Action Days teach people how they can reduce their impact on our sewer system and the river.

“If we want to stop combined sewer overflows altogether, reducing inputs to the sewer system is crucial,” said MWRD Board President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “The Tunnel and Reservoir Plan (TARP, aka Deep Tunnel) can handle our stormwater and wastewater most of time but we still need the help of actions such as this.” The MWRD joined Friends early on to support Overflow Action Days and in December pledged to reduce their own water use by installing 15 low flow urinals from Sloan Valve Company at *(continued)*

April Overflow Action Month to Help the Chicago River *(continued)*

their corporate headquarters in downtown Chicago and by issuing a challenge for other government agencies to follow suit. The MWRD treats 1.4 billion gallons a day at their seven wastewater treatment plants.

The first Overflow Action is to sign up for Overflow Action Alerts at www.chicagoriver.org which will guide people through the month. For more information on what to do or join as a partner, contact Joanne So Young Dill, director of strategic initiatives, at (312) 939-0490, ext. 23.

Founded in 1979, Friends of the Chicago River is an award winning nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve and protect the Chicago River for people, plants, and animals. With over 6,000 members, volunteers, and online advocates, Friends works to make the river greener and more accessible, while building awareness of the benefits that a clean, healthy river can bring to communities across the watershed. Friends of the Chicago River is working to make the Chicago River one of the world's greatest metropolitan rivers. For more information on Friends of the Chicago River, please visit our website: www.chicagoriver.org.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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