

# A Message From the Mayor



One thing we all have in common is our daily need for fresh, clean drinking water. Chicagoans are fortunate to have one of the world's largest sources of fresh water at their doorstep. Other communities in the United States and around the world are not so lucky. Many cities and towns are running out of water or struggling just to keep the water they do have clean.

Lake Michigan seems vast and indestructible, but it is slowly being damaged by overuse and pollution. We need to reverse this trend and protect the Lake so future generations can use and enjoy its clean water. In addition to providing the water that flows into our homes, Lake Michigan also provides habitat for animals and opportunities for swimming, fishing and boating. Our lake is one of our most valuable resources.

This brochure highlights some of the major issues our valuable water resources are facing today and into the future. It also highlights many simple things you can do to help conserve, protect and manage our water. It sustains us and we must protect it.

Richard M. Daley, Mayor  
City of Chicago

# The City of Chicago Leads by Example

You're not the only one who's helping keep Chicago's water clean and plentiful. The City of Chicago is working hard to protect Lake Michigan and the Chicago River.

Several infrastructure systems have been renovated to conserve water.

- On/off buttons have been installed on public drinking fountains, conserving water that was once wasted by continuous flow.
- The City of Chicago has cut water consumption by nearly 19 percent, largely by replacing and repairing old leaking water mains.
- Millions of gallons have already been saved by safely recycling water from public pools and splash fountains.

The City of Chicago has launched a number of programs that are protecting Chicago's water quality.

- Newly constructed street medians have been designed to capture stormwater runoff and filter pollutants before they enter the sewer system.
- Many new building and roadway constructions have diverted clean water away from sewers and into the ground and waterways.



- The City of Chicago holds Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days for citizens to safely discard chemicals, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, paints and motor oil.
- Rooftop gardens, permeable surfaces and other "green infrastructure" solutions are being employed in city-managed buildings and land.

Stormwater is being diverted from the City's sewers and managed in a variety of creative ways.

- "Rain blockers" have been installed in the catch basins of street sewers. They help prevent excess rainwater from getting into basements.
- Special drains that allow water to flow directly into the ground are being installed in many alleys.
- The rooftop garden on City Hall, as well as rooftop gardens on many other public and private buildings, absorb large amounts of rainwater, decreasing the amount flowing into the sewers.

Find out how you can help. Please visit [www.cityofchicago.org](http://www.cityofchicago.org) or call the water hotline at **312-743-WATER (743-9283)**.

# Save the Source

because  
every drop  
counts!



Action H<sub>2</sub>O

City of Chicago  
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

# Water Conservation

## Water Wisdom

The Chicago region uses 2.4 billion gallons of water per day. That is more water than 4500 Olympic swimming pools.

### What is the Issue?

Globally, access to clean water is the key environmental issue of the next century. Lake Michigan and the Chicago River are priceless resources. They sustain us and we must protect them. While we are fortunate to have access to a seemingly infinite supply, our water resources are actually limited and we should not take them for granted. Every faucet, sink, bathtub, shower, hose, sprinkler, dishwasher, washing machine and car wash in the city uses water from a single source: Lake Michigan.

### What Can I Do?

You can conserve water every day.

- **Turn off the faucet** while you brush your teeth or shave.
- **Install water-saving fixtures** and appliances in your home.
- **Repair leaks** in your sinks and toilets.
- **Install a rain barrel** to catch the water from your roof so you can use it to water your garden.
- **Plant native plants** that require little watering.
- **Water your lawn** only during early morning or evening hours.



# Stormwater Management

### What is the Issue?

Rain showers can be wonderful. They wash our surroundings, water our gardens and often accompany welcome, cool air to our atmosphere. But during heavy rains, the sewer system, which conveys both our stormwater and wastewater, can fill up. In some cases, when the sewer system fills up this rainwater/wastewater mix must be discharged, untreated, into the river system. During extreme storms, the rainwater/wastewater mixture can even be released into Lake Michigan, negatively affecting the quality of the water. Full sewers can also back up into basements.

### What Can I Do?

You can help reduce the burden on sewers by preventing excess rainwater from entering the sewers when it rains. Try these steps.

- **Disconnect your downspout.** If this is something that makes sense for your home, you can allow rainwater from your roof to run into your yard or garden, instead of into the sewer. Or, you can funnel it into a rain barrel and use it later to water your plants.
- **Plant a rain garden** using water-loving plants. Native Midwestern plants have long roots and can absorb more rainwater than traditional turf landscapes.
- **Let the rain soak through.** Pavements such as asphalt and concrete don't allow rain water through. Instead, rain that hits pavement collects chemicals and oils and washes them into the sewer. By using gravel, crushed rock or stone pavers, you let clean rainwater soak through to the ground where it belongs.

## Water Wisdom

Chicago purifies and delivers water to the City and 124 surrounding suburbs.

Find out how you can help. Please visit [www.cityofchicago.org](http://www.cityofchicago.org) or call the water hotline at 312-743-WATER (743-9283).

# Water Quality



### What is the Issue?

Rainwater becomes polluted as it flows off of streets, sidewalks and parking lots, carrying with it motor oil, litter and chemicals. Fertilizers and herbicides used on lawns also wash off into the sewers when it rains. During heavy storms, sewer water can overflow into the Chicago River or Lake Michigan, carrying these pollutants with it.

Our water resources are vital for drinking, recreation and quality of life. It is important that we not pollute them. The Chicago River is quickly becoming our "second shoreline," and many people spend time fishing, boating and canoeing on the river. It is home to a variety of plant and animal species, and it is important that we keep it clean.

### What Can I Do?

You can help reduce the amount of pollution that ends up in the waterways.

- **Never discard** any chemicals, pharmaceuticals or motor oil down any drain or sewer. These substances contaminate the sewage treatment system and can pollute the rivers and lakes.
- **Put litter in its place.** Litter on beaches attracts seagulls. These birds leave behind their waste,

which can increase the levels of bacteria in the water, making it unsafe for swimming.

- **Reduce fertilizer, pesticide and herbicide use** on your lawn and garden. When it rains these chemicals wash into our sewers.

