



Press Release

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MWRD commissioners unanimously approve herbicide restriction



Commissioner Frank Avila (right) presented Ryan Anderson, of the Midwest Pesticide Action Center, with a resolution recognizing the organization for educating the public on the danger of herbicides, which the MWRD works to keep out of the regional water environment.

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Great Chicago's (MWRD's) Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve a new policy restricting the use of toxic and persistent herbicides on landscaped areas on and around MWRD facilities and infrastructure.

Commissioners also moved to monitor and evaluate the impact of the policy in regards to the spreading of invasive weeds, the appearance of the MWRD's facilities and security of the MWRD's facilities and safety of the employees and citizens. Updates will be provided to the Board of Commissioners after three years of monitoring.

The policy's adoption came as a result of the MWRD's response to potentially toxic and environmentally persistent chemicals used in commonly used herbicides that could threaten the safety and health of both humans and the environment. After being applied to lawns and other landscaped areas, herbicides combine with stormwater runoff and sewage to enter drains and sewers that eventually lead to MWRD water reclamation plants (WRPs). The minute concentrations of the chemical runoff can potentially pass through MWRD treatment and then enter Chicago area waterways and prove harmful to the local water environment. Each day, the MWRD treats an average of 1.4 billion gallons of water at its seven WRPs.

"The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago takes safety very seriously, especially in regards to our employees and environment. With this new policy we are taking a step in the right direction to a cleaner and safer world and water supply," said Commissioner Frank Avila. "We are committed to our mission of recovering resources and transforming water, and we made significant strides towards that goal with the passing of this policy."

The MWRD partnered with the Midwest Pesticide Action Center (MPAC) to gain support of this measure. The MPAC, which was also recognized by the MWRD Board of Commissioners for its work on the Midwest Grows Green (MGG) initiative, was equally thrilled about the new policy.

"By using synthetic herbicides as a last resort, the MWRD will significantly reduce its herbicide use and expenses," said Ryan Anderson, program and communications manager for the MPAC. "Other water treatment, park and school districts can learn from this action and help achieve healthier and safer places to live, learn and play for our children, pets and wildlife."

The MWRD will use synthetic herbicides where natural applications are ineffective but will completely stop using synthetic herbicide to control weeds in turf landscape, shrub beds and paved areas. Instead, the MWRD plans to use natural herbicides or mechanical methods such as mowing to control invasive weeds. The adoption of this policy will reduce the use of herbicides by at least 92 percent.

The MPAC's MGG initiative promotes natural lawn care to protect people, pets and the environment by recruiting pesticide-free parks, asking retailers to eco-label their lawn care products and obtaining pledges from individuals to reduce their own synthetic pesticide and fertilizer use. The MPAC has promoted and advanced safer alternatives to potentially harmful herbicides for 22 years, and Commissioner Avila has worked diligently to protect the water environment by crusading against the use of herbicides on MWRD property and lawns across Cook County. The American home and garden sector applies more than 90 million pounds of herbicide product to lawns and gardens each year.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming 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.