**Wastewater treatment – the key to clean water**

Minnesotans take pride in our lakes and rivers. Community wastewater treatment facilities (WWTF) and their operators play a critical role in maintaining a health community and preserving and protecting our waters. These facilities treat wastewater that comes from our household sinks, toilets, showers, and laundry, as well as industrial sources like manufacturers and hospitals. This treatment allows the water to be reused and flow back into our rivers and streams.

Nearly 75% of the municipal and industrial wastewater generated in Minnesota is discharged to a city-owned sanitary sewer collection system, treated, and then put into the environment. Therefore, it’s important for citizens and communities to invest in and maintain wastewater infrastructure to help ensure Minnesota’s waterways continue to support aquatic life, healthy communities, and a strong economy.

Wastewater from homes and businesses used to dump directly into our waterways, choking water so much that we couldn’t swim in rivers and fish couldn’t survive and the water wasn’t always healthy to drink.

Thankfully, 50 years ago, Congress passed the Clean Water Act (CWA) establishing the framework for regulating pollution in waters and creating water quality standards to protect drinking water and maintain a healthy aquatic community for animals and recreational uses.

Through the CWA, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) regulates WWTFs making it illegal to discharge pollution from a point source like a WWTF pipe or a street drain. without a [permit](https://www.pca.state.mn.us/business-with-us/wastewater-permits). Permits tell these facilities, based on the federal and state water quality standards, what they need to do to clean the wastewater before it is put into a river or stream. These facility permits are re-evaluated every five years to ensure facilities are continuing to meet our water quality standards and keeping pollutants out of our waters.

The wastewater treatment process is monitored closely to ensure pollution is being reduced as required by the permit. WWTFs and MPCA also work with local industries to monitor, limit, and reduce discharges of toxins before it reaches the WWTFs. The MPCA's compliance and enforcement program tracks how well WWTFs comply with their permits and takes enforcement action when necessary.

As a result of the Clean Water Act, many of Minnesota’s rivers and lakes have made dramatic improvements. Our waters support aquatic life, allow for recreation, and many even serve as drinking water sources.

**What can you do**

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, rethink what you flush or allow to go down your drains.

* **Only flush toilet paper.** Toilet paper was designed to be “flushable,” that is, break down in water. Related products, such as paper towels, facial tissues, baby wipes, disposable wipes will clog pipes, leading to sewer backups and costly repairs. There are products that claim to be flushable, but the truth is that only toilet paper is flushable and will not clog your sewer line. The “flushable” label on wipes products just means they will pass through the drain but may still cause problems with your or your community’s plumbing sewer line and treatment plant.
* **Don’t pour grease or oils down drains**. These products repel water and form fatbergs that build that build up and clog pipes. Dispose of fat, oil, and grease by pouring them onto newspaper or other paper items in the trash, or into a non-recyclable container and then into the trash. Or, soak up grease with pieces of crusty bread pieces, and then put the bread on bird feeders for wild critters. Wipe greasy pans, pots, and other dishes with a paper towel before washing.
* **Drop off old medicines to a collection box.** WWTFs aren’t designed to remove [medicine](https://www.pca.state.mn.us/news-and-stories/dont-flush-medicines-down-the-drain) from water. All old medications should be deposed of via collection boxes. Use our interactive map to find a [drop-off location near you](https://mpca.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f6e2ca44e7594dd29ff015a97aaee259).