Water Quality Standards in the Chicago Area Waterway System

Upgraded water quality standards for the Chicago River Waterway System went into effect on July 1st, 2015. Comprehensive standard changes can be found on the Illinois Joint Committee on Administrative Rules’ website as well as through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The following standard upgrades will have an immediate impact on the water quality of the Chicago River and the people, plants and wildlife that depend on it:

- **Temperature Standards:** Temperature varies throughout the CAWS because of its many industrial uses. Temperature standards were the last to be approved by the Illinois Pollution Control Board.
  - **Current Standard:** The water temperature in the CAWS cannot exceed 60 degrees F on any single day from December through March, and cannot exceed 90 degrees F on any single day from April through October.
  - **Old Standard:** The water temperature in the CAWS cannot exceed 93.2 degrees Fahrenheit 95% of the time April-November and 100 degrees Fahrenheit 100% of the time from December-March.

- **Dissolved Oxygen Standards:** Most of the CAWS falls into the Aquatic Life A standards for dissolved oxygen. The narrative description protects physical conditions and habitat for spawning.
  - **Current Standard:** 5.0 mg/L from March through July and 4.0 mg/L August through February. DO may not drop below 3.5 mg/L at any time.
  - **Old Standards:** 4 mg/L throughout the CAWS, excluding Cal-Sag Channel.

- **Fecal coliform Standards:**
  - **Current Standard:** Narrative standard that requires effluent disinfection for wastewater treatment facilities.
  - **Old Standard:** None.

- **Chlorides Standards**
  - **Current Standard (2015-2018):** 1,500 milligrams per liter during the winter and 500 milligrams per liter during the summer.
  - **Future Standard (2018):** 500 milligrams per liter all year round.
  - **Old Standard:** None.