News & Updates from
Des Moines Water Works
SEPTEMBER 2019

H2O LINE

THINK DOWNSTREAM

A Fire Hydrant's Important Role in the Health and Safety of our Community

While many of us drive or walk past fire hydrants without much thought, Des Moines Water Works takes great pride in the installation and maintenance of the nearly 10,000 fire hydrants in Des Moines and surrounding communities. Fire hydrants provide an essential function in the maintenance of the water system and adequate fire protection for our community.

Every year in the fall, fire hydrant inspection or "hydrant walking" is completed to ensure all fire hydrants in the system are in working order. This annual inspection ensures hydrants have not been damaged or are not holding water that could freeze over winter, both of which would render the hydrant unusable in the event of an emergency.

While Des Moines Water Works is responsible for maintenance of the fire hydrants that firefighters use to protect our community, fire hydrants are actually used more frequently for water system maintenance. Any time maintenance is performed on the water system (i.e. water main break, valve repair, etc.), air is allowed to escape from the pipes through the hydrant, and water is flushed from the hydrant to ensure water delivered to customers following maintenance is clear.

You can help Des Moines Water Works and your fire department by following these simple tips to keep fire hydrants working properly and accessible when they are needed:

- Keep cars, bikes, toys and other objects away from fire hydrants at all times.
- During winter months, shovel snow away from fire hydrants.
- Mow and trim grass or weeds around fire hydrants near your property.
- Do not plant flowers or shrubs around fire hydrants.
- Do not paint fire hydrants – the color of the fire hydrant top is indicative of water flow available for fire protection.

Unauthorized use of a hydrant can cause significant damage to the distribution system, the hydrant, and your home or business plumbing. Additionally, it may cause damage to our water supply. Any unauthorized use of a fire hydrant may result in a $1,500 fine and misdemeanor charges.

If you notice a damaged fire hydrant or witness suspicious activity near a fire hydrant, please call Des Moines Water Works at (515) 283-8700. Your call is important to the water service and fire protection of your home, business and others around you.

2201 George Flagg Parkway | Des Moines, IA 50321 | (515) 283-8700 | www.dmww.com | | dsmh2o.com

Des Moines Water Works
Water You Can Trust for Life

Harmful Algal Blooms in Iowa Waterways

Recent media attention surrounding harmful algae blooms (also known as cyanobacteria) continues to show the deterioration of water quality in Iowa. The presence of cyanobacteria and related cyanotoxins in Iowa's lakes and rivers are forcing pet owners, water recreation enthusiasts, and water utilities to be on alert.

Cyanobacteria can grow and multiply quickly where there are high nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus). Blooms create blue-green murky water, visible surface scum and a foul odor. The blooms can spread across the water, but often will accumulate in shoreline areas.

Certain forms of cyanobacteria can also produce cyanotoxins that can make humans and animals sick with direct contact, or if ingested or inhaled. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) monitors state park beaches weekly in the summer for the cyanotoxin microcystin. It is important to note that while DNR monitors state park beaches for this toxin, many other public and private beaches, streams, rivers, and ponds are not monitored by DNR, but are also susceptible to harmful algal blooms and cyanotoxins.

For drinking water utilities that use surface water, elevated cyanotoxin levels from cyanobacteria also raise health concerns related to the liver, nervous system and gastrointestinal system.

Microcystin was the cyanotoxin found in the finished drinking water of Toledo, Ohio, in 2014, that prompted the city to issue a "Do Not Drink" order for its 500,000 customers. Microcystin was released by a cyanobacteria bloom in Lake Erie at the time, near the city's water intake system.

Currently there is not a federal standard for cyanotoxins in finished drinking water; however, a growing number of states are introducing their own guidelines and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has named cyanotoxins as a candidate for federal regulation with recently published guidelines.

Des Moines Water Works has an aggressive testing regimen for the presence of harmful algal blooms and cyanotoxins. While many water utilities do not have equipment to test for these toxins, Des Moines Water Works invested in instrumentation that allows staff to monitor for microcystin and three other cyanotoxins.

Des Moines Water Works continues to advocate for a holistic approach for addressing water quality in Iowa, including practices to reduce excess nutrients, *E. Coli*, eroded soil, and emerging contaminants in water – much of which can be attributable to agricultural production.

Think Downstream: Stormwater Management Cost-Share Program for Des Moines Residents

As water travels downstream, it also brings with it many other things along the way like soil, debris, and other contaminants. We all have responsibility for the quality and quantity of water that may flow to our next door or downstream neighbors.

The City of Des Moines, along with other metro communities, is offering a program to residents that enhances local water quality. The Stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) Cost-Share Program offers ways to help homeowners' lawn soak up stormwater and provides funding to offset the cost of the work.

Practicing and investing in new ways to manage stormwater comes with many benefits to the property owner and the environment. One of the most popular practices is soil quality restoration, which is the process of improving soil health on new and existing lawns through tillage, aeration, and compost. These steps ultimately increase infiltration and organic matter content so that landscapes can absorb more rain and shed less runoff.

The City of Des Moines offers a rebate of 50% of the first $4,000 for property owners who meet the requirements. Cost-share funds help pay for the following practices:

- Rain barrels
- Rain gardens
- Bioretention cells
- Pavement systems
- Soil quality restoration
- Streambank stabilization
- Other similar practices approved by the Public Works Director

Work must be pre-approved by the City of Des Moines and completed by June 30, 2023. Applications for reimbursement must be submitted by June 1, 2023. For more information or to apply, visit www.DSM.city/SWBMP or contact the Clean Water Program Office at (515) 323-8165 or stormwater@dmgov.org.

All Iowans – rural, suburban, and urban – are encouraged to Think Downstream and consider what they may do to help make Iowa's water sources safe for drinking and recreation.