

The Chicago area is home to a large and diverse series of waterways used for commercial and recreational purposes by people across Cook and neighboring counties, the state of Illinois and the Midwest.

The demands on the Chicago area waterways have changed significantly over the last few decades. Improved water quality conditions and fisheries are attracting greater numbers of diverse recreational users.

For this purpose, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency along with other federal, state and local agencies has started on a multi-year, comprehensive evaluation of the waterways. The evaluation, called a Use Attainability Analysis, will be the first such in-depth analysis in 30 years. The results of the study will be used to determine how Chicago area waterways can best be used commercially and recreationally in the future. The IEPA expects to complete this evaluation by 2005.

Public meetings will continue to be held throughout the Chicago area to keep all interested parties up to date on the Use Attainability Analysis and how it will impact the waterways. For more information about public meetings and the evaluation, please call 847-294-4000 or visit the web site at <http://www.ChicagoAreaWaterways.org>.

Additional Resources

For more information regarding suitable uses of the designated waterways or the waterway evaluation, please call 847-294-4000 or visit <http://www.ChicagoAreaWaterways.org>.

For general information, access the following web sites:

Illinois Department of Public Health
<http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/beachhome.htm>

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
<http://www.epa.state.il.us/water>

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
Dump Hotline 1-800-332-DUMP
<http://www.mwrldg.dst.il.us/>

For more information on fish advisories and other public health concerns contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 5
Phone 800-621-8431
<http://www.epa.gov/region5/>

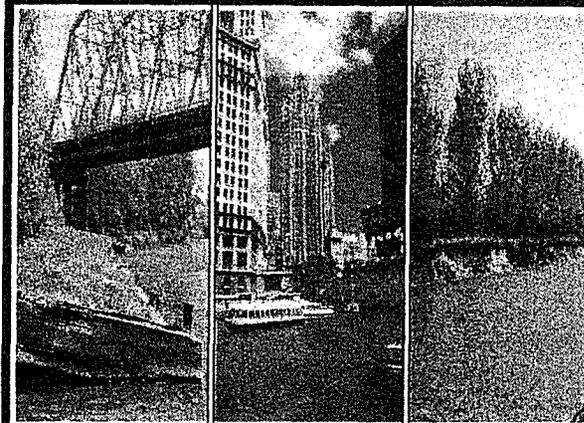
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Phone 404-639-3311
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming/>

Illinois Department of Public Health
Phone 888-522-1282
<http://www.idph.state.il.us/public/press03/fish.htm>
<http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/factsheets/fishadv.htm>

Friends of the Chicago River
Phone 312-939-0490
<http://www.chicagoriver.org>

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Chicago Area Waterways Health Precautions



Precaution is advised for certain parts of the Chicago Area Waterway System while the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency conducts an evaluation (see inside) to determine appropriate uses for such waterways.

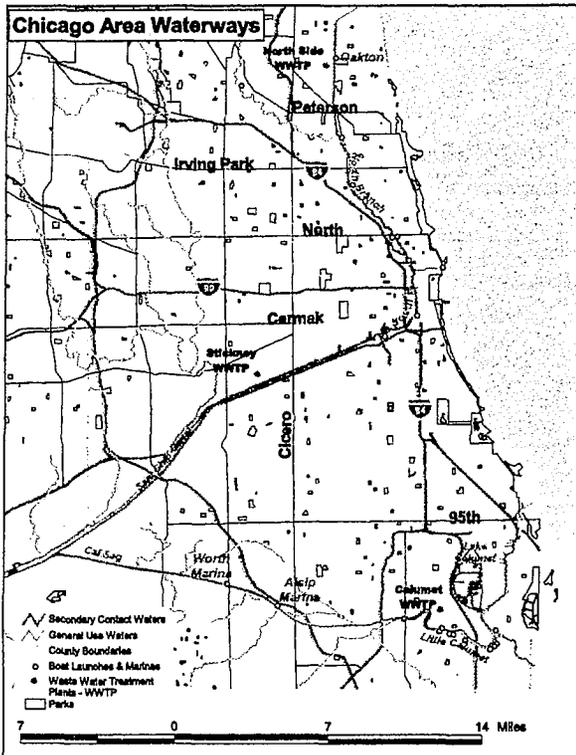
The designated waterways receive non-disinfected discharges from sewage treatment plants, industries and other sources and may contain harmful bacteria and other germs.

Due to high germ content and the risk of illness, the waterways (see specified sections on map) have been deemed unsuitable for activities that involve direct body contact, including:

- Wading
- Swimming
- Jet skiing/Waterskiing/Tubing

These precautions apply to the following designated waterways in the Chicago Area:

- Calumet-Sag Channel
- Little Calumet River North Leg
 - From the Grand Calumet River to the Calumet-Sag Channel
- Grand Calumet River
- Calumet River
 - Excludes the 6.8 mile segment extending from the O'Brien Lock and Dam to Lake Michigan
- Lake Calumet
- Des Plaines River
 - From the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to the Interstate 55 bridge southwest of Joliet
- Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal
- South Branch of the Chicago River
- South Fork of the South Branch ("Bubbly Creek")
- Chicago River
- North Branch of the Chicago River
 - From the North Shore Channel to the South Branch
- North Shore Channel



The following precautions are advised when using the Chicago area waterways or the waters therein:

General Precautions

- Avoid swallowing the water.
- Avoid physical contact with the water, especially with exposed wounds that could provide a route for harmful germs to enter the body.
- Wash hands thoroughly before touching or consuming food products or objects to be placed in mouth.
- Children and people with weakened immune systems are especially advised to limit exposure to these waters.

Safety Precautions

- All people, especially young children are advised to wear life jackets at all times when in a boat or on the shoreline.
- Survey water for hazardous obstacles (e.g. rocks, driftwood, etc.) before and while operating a boat.
- Obey boating rules when operating any vessel on the waterways and be careful when launching a boat.
- Never dive or jump into the water, whether from a boat or a bridge.

Fish Consumption Precautions

- Be aware of fish consumption advisories for the waterway and for the specific fish.
- If you catch and keep fish from the waterways, follow guidelines for fish preparation. The fish advisory number is 888-522-1282 and the web site is <http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/factsheets/fishadv.htm>

Frequently Asked Questions

How do harmful germs get in the water?

Several sources contribute to the presence of harmful germs in the waterways, including:

- Faulty sewage disposal systems
- Combined and sanitary sewer overflows
- Wild and domestic animal waste
- Illegal discharges to drains and sewers
- Storm water runoff
- Treated, but non-disinfected wastewater effluent

The evaluation will help determine what kind of sewage and storm control plan should be put in place to control the various pollution sources.

What type of illness can you get from contact with the Chicago Area Waterways?

Stomach illnesses - including diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, as well as headache and low-grade fever are most common. Skin rashes and earaches ("Swimmer's Itch") can also occur as a result of immersion in contaminated waters.

Contact a physician immediately if any illness is experienced following contact with any of the waterways.

Why is the waterway evaluation being done now?

Conditions have changed dramatically since the original environmental standards were established over three decades ago. Major improvements in water quality, altered land use and additional public access along the waterways have occurred. Such improvements and conditions have produced both greater opportunity and heightened public interest in increased environmental and recreational uses within and along the waterways. The evaluation will modernize environmental regulations to reflect the current and future potential uses of the system.

Who is responsible for issuing fish advisories?

An inter-agency task force in the state of Illinois routinely monitors and annually updates a fish advisory for commercial and recreational fishermen.