

Reserving Hydrants for Fire Suppression – Community Gardens

2010 is the 20th year the Milwaukee Water Works has been supplying water to community gardens using hydrants and we are proud to have played a role in the development of this community effort. We are moving in a collaborative and cooperative manner to help the gardens find water sources that do not involve hydrants.

At this time, there is no deadline to end the use of hydrants for community gardens. The Water Works has assured stakeholders that hydrants permits will be available in 2010 and 2011.

The July 14 meeting with community gardeners and others was a great success. The roundtable discussions yielded many ideas for short- and long term alternatives to using hydrants for watering gardens. We look forward to further discussion and satisfactory resolution for all interested.

The Milwaukee Water Works is gradually removing all non-fire suppression uses from hydrants so they are reserved for firefighting. The objectives are to preserve public safety, protect the distribution system and improve water accountability. The Milwaukee Fire Department supports this effort and that Milwaukee's longstanding tradition of community gardening is important to the quality of life in our city.

The Milwaukee Water Works recently opened a bulk water filling station for some contractors and landscapers at its Meter Services Shop, 1901 S. Kinnickinnic Ave. We will begin working with contractors and construction and sewer projects to phase out non-emergency and non-metered use of hydrants.

During the past five years, the Milwaukee Water Works has asked the public not to illegally open hydrants during hot weather. This public outreach has saved millions of gallons of water and protected hydrants from damage.

Here are reasons for removing hydrants from community gardening use:

- Water accountability is very important. There is, at this time, no requirement for the water to be metered.
- The hydrant is "live" all summer. In a cold climate like Milwaukee's, hydrants are designed to remain empty until used and being constantly pressurized can damage the hydrant.
- There are instances of inappropriate use.
- There is risk of injury from a loose hydrant cap forcefully blowing off the hydrant. This is a low probability but high consequence event.

The City of Milwaukee looks forward to continuing the public dialogue to make sure Milwaukee's community gardens are sustainable, thriving and plentiful.