

Water WoRDs

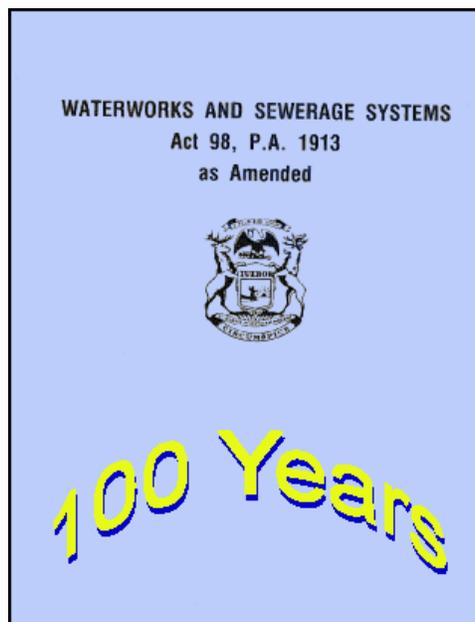
Updates from the Water Resources Division



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A Century of Wastewater Systems Regulation

Michigan has a rich history of progress and innovation, and the year 1913 certainly made its mark. That year, Henry Ford revolutionized manufacturing by perfecting the moving assembly line that could produce a Model T in ninety three minutes. While extremely important to the progress of Michigan and its economy, history and culture, this was not the only major event to occur in 1913 related to progress in Michigan. The Waterworks and Sewerage Systems Act 98, PA 1913, as amended (Act 98), was enacted that year, making this the 100-year anniversary for a law assuring safe drinking water and protecting the valuable and abundant water resources that are a longstanding legacy here in Michigan. While historians and archaeologists have documented water supply and wastewater systems dating back hundreds, or even thousands of years, it wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century for sewers, and the mid-twentieth century for wastewater treatment, to become common practices. Providing infrastructure for drinking water and wastewater was in response to outbreaks of waterborne illnesses, especially after scientific research in the late nineteenth century resulted in a better understanding of the causes of such illnesses. These outbreaks, which coincided with world population increases, industrialization, and growing urban centers, resulted in the need to develop and construct water and wastewater infrastructure. At that time, Michigan legislators recognized the need to regulate the construction and operation of such infrastructure, to further aid in protecting public health and the environment. And so, Act 98 became Michigan law.



Act 98 was initially under the authority of the Department of Health and required submission of general plans prior to construction of waterworks and sewerage systems, contained the concept of operation reports, and allowed for state inspection and surveys of such systems. Subsequent revisions to the statute were adopted in 1931 and 1949. In 1976, the water supply regulations were incorporated into Act 399, Michigan's Safe Drinking Water Act, while sewage regulations remained in Act 98. Finally, in 1994, amidst a major reorganization of public health and environmental regulations, Act 98 became Part 41 of Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Public Act 451 of 1994 (Part 41). Part 41 is currently under the authority of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and regulates public wastewater systems through the Water Resources Division (WRD) (both treatment and collection systems). The

WRD's Part 41 program staff oversees treatment facility classification and operator certification, construction permits for wastewater facilities, and operation and maintenance of wastewater facilities.

It was not until after passage of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972 that there were comprehensive regulatory requirements to address untreated wastewater discharges and require secondary treatment. Many wastewater systems were constructed through a federal grants program that continues to provide low-interest loans and grants to communities today. The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program was created in the early 1970s as part of the federal Clean Water Act's



regulation of point source discharges to surface water, including discharges from public wastewater treatment plants. Part 41 ensures that public wastewater treatment plants and collection systems are properly designed, constructed and operated to meet NPDES and other federal and state requirements.

Progress is often defined as the steady improvement of a society or civilization. In Michigan, the "Great Lakes State," we are defined by our abundant fresh water resources. Michigan's water resources provide drinking water, the foundation for numerous recreation and tourism opportunities, and water supply for industry and agriculture. Please join us in celebrating 100 years of water and wastewater systems regulation in Michigan and continuing along a path of steady improvement to protect our valuable water resources.

Stay tuned for additional Water WoRDs posts this December that take a look back at how far we have come in improving Michigan's water resources. We intend to end our year with a few words from our WRD Chief, Bill Creal, sharing his thoughts on our progress and challenges to come.