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## H2NOW Chicago Press Release

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### **Current Launches First-Ever Water-Quality Monitoring for Chicago River**

*H2NOW reports from three locations every 15 minutes*

Sept. 2, 2021 (CHICAGO) — H2NOW, the first real-time monitoring tool for the Chicago River, is now available at [H2NOWChicago.org](https://H2NOWChicago.org). The platform is providing water quality reports every 15 minutes from three spots along the river and testing an array of novel technologies. (Photos and video can be downloaded [here](#).)

[Current](#), the Chicago-based catalyst for better, cleaner water, is leading H2NOW operations with the support of more than 20 partners.

"H2NOW is for anyone who cares about the health of the Chicago River," said Alaina Harkness, executive director of Current. "People who use the river for play or for work — boaters, kayakers and business owners — will find it especially useful. H2NOW reports on the river like a meteorologist reports on the weather, giving you information to help determine when the river is safe to use, and when you should stay away."

Current has placed H2NOW sensors that record an indicator of fecal matter levels at a popular recreation spot on each of the three branches of the river: North, South and Main. Sensors will be removed from the river during the winter.

"It is critically important that we maintain and protect our precious resources, particularly our waterways," said Mayor Lori Lightfoot. "Testing and monitoring our water is the first step in instituting protections for the environment and our residents. Being the first of its kind, this platform and the water monitoring technology it is testing in our city are very exciting and helpful not only to our residents, but can no doubt be used by other cities in the future. I am happy to see the development of this technology that will provide a better and more efficient way to ensure the safe use and enjoyment of the Chicago River."

"The Chicago Department of Water Management was a founding member of Current to help identify and implement this innovative water technology," said Dr. Andrea Cheng, Commissioner of the Department of Water Management. "H2NOW is a terrific example of how new water technology can connect residents to their environment."

H2NOW is a first for many reasons. To date, public river monitoring has been accomplished by sending samples to a lab and waiting at least a day for results.

"Public agencies have used data mostly for internal monitoring and communication," Harkness said. "The technology platform we are testing, including a new type of sensor, puts us at the cutting edge of emerging river-monitoring science. This allows us to collect and share real-time data.

"As technology improves, we aim to add new features to the platform, export it to other cities and enrich public information about rivers and other urban waterways," Harkness said.

Building and launching H2NOW required collaboration among more than 20 partners, including the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, which protects and monitors waterways and oversees wastewater treatment and stormwater management for Chicago and 128 suburbs, and the City of Chicago's Department of Water Management, which is responsible for delivering drinking water to 125 suburbs and removing wastewater and stormwater through local sewers.

"The different segments of the Chicago River system are as diverse as the community that uses it," said MWRD President of the Board of Commissioners Kari K. Steele. "A better understanding of these different segments will help us make informed decisions about how we interact with the river. H2NOW is at the frontier of testing new technologies to improve our understanding of the river."

Fecal matter pollutes the Chicago River in two main ways.

First, rainwater that falls over 1,834 square miles from Wisconsin to Indiana drains into the Chicago River, carrying, among other things, droppings from birds and other animals.

Second, heavy rains can occasionally overwhelm local sewer systems, constructed more than 100 years ago before wastewater treatment processes existed. These events can cause harmful combined sewer overflows, or "CSOs," into the Chicago River. These "CSOs" are reported by the MWRD and other advocacy groups. H2NOW Chicago augments the CSO alert system by providing more detailed information about river water quality.

"The H2NOW devices have multiple sensors that together provide an estimate of microbial matter, which includes fecal contamination," said Svetlana Taylor, technical program director for Current. "Believe it or not, fecal coliforms, as scientists call them, are not inherently harmful to humans. Instead, they're a key indicator; they tend to go

hand-in-hand with other disease-causing bacteria and viruses that pose health risks to people."

#### ABOUT CURRENT

Current is a catalyst for better, cleaner water. Founded in Chicago in 2016, our mission is to grow an inclusive Blue Economy, accelerate innovation, and solve pressing water challenges. We bring together corporations, nonprofits and governments to develop water management policies and test new technologies — projects that would be too risky or even impossible for any one group to undertake. Our innovation hub is growing because water is no longer an issue; it's a crisis. Our health and environment hang in the balance.

The information provided by H2NOW is not meant to evaluate biological safety of the river, and neither Current nor its partners are responsible and/or legally liable for illnesses contracted/injuries incurred by persons who engage with the river based on H2NOW data.