



## Cities Tell Residents Softeners May Be Unnecessary And Look For Ways To Remove From Homes

If you live in the communities of Lakefield or Morris, you may have already heard about this from your city leaders. Communities are caught in the middle, attempting to meet the EPA's new regulations on chloride discharge while keeping residents, and businesses, happy. In the process of disseminating information about upgraded centralized "water softening" treatment plants, many communities are suggesting softener bans, or asking residents to consider disconnect their units.

MWQA is urging its members to pay particular attention to what's happening in their communities, either by attending council meetings or following up on news articles. Notify MWQA if you hear anything that may require our assistance or provide the opportunity for MWQA to work with your community to spread the word about optimizing softeners rather than eliminating them.

MWQA has compiled information from many governmental agencies and newspapers, including those of Lakefield and Morris. Here is a sample:

*From February 15, 2019 Stevens County Times, in Morris: "Will you need a softener in Morris? Maybe, maybe not. Although the city of Morris will be providing better water with its new water treatment plant, residents may not want to chuck their water softener yet...Residents may still want to use their softeners to additionally soften the five grains of hardness, engineer Kris Swanson said. Swanson, of Bolton and Menk, the firm working on the water plant, said it will be very important that softeners in use after the plant's expected opening in April, are calibrated correctly. It will also be important that any outdated softeners are no longer used, Swanson said. The city must reduce the amount of sodium chloride it releases into the Pomme de Terre watershed through treated wastewater. By softening the city's water supply, users don't have to soften water or they can dramatically reduce the need for salt in their softeners, Swanson said. The treated discharged wastewater will mean the city can meet Minnesota Pollution Control Agency standards, Swanson said.*

*Improperly adjusted water softeners will also create problems for the city, Swanson said. If water softeners aren't set properly, there is an increased risk the city will not meet its sodium chloride wastewater discharge levels, Swanson said. 'If you aren't hitting those limits...,' Swanson said. 'The city has few options if sodium chloride limits are exceeded, Swanson. One is to eliminate water softeners at properties within the city, Swanson said.'*

*From KMRS, Morris, Minnesota February 14, 2019: "With the new \$18 million water treatment facility set to begin operating in April for Stevens County residents, the future of water softeners was a point of discussion at Tuesday night's Morris City Council meeting. The new plant will bring the hardness of the water down from 45 grains of hardness down to 5 grains, which is low enough to classify it as soft water. Council members like Kevin Wohlers agreed that water softener companies will need to work with the City and all citizens to make the necessary adjustments to water softeners currently in use. Wohlers noted that it does not make sense to spend \$18 million on a new water treatment plant if area water softeners are not compatible with it. All stakeholders will need to partner up, he said. Old softeners, it was noted, will need to be disconnected, and an inspection of each household in the City will need to be conducted. If chloride is still found to be in the water stream, City Manager Blaine Hill said they will need to track that down and the City will know where it's coming from."*

*From Lakefield March 4, 2019 City Council Minutes: "Karen Cavett-S.E.H. Engineer - information on funding for the removal of water softeners from homes related to R.O. System. A conference call with MPCA has revealed that PFA grant funds cannot be used to assist residents with the removal of*

***softeners. The softeners are considered private property and PFA dollars can only be spent on public property. The council discussed options. At this time, staff will contact Senator Bill Weber to discuss possible options.”***

From the Lakefield Standard Newspaper, March 6, 2019: ***“MPCA deals blow to city on softeners. State funding will not be available to help pay for the removal of individual water softeners as part of the city’s upcoming multi-million-dollar wastewater infrastructure improvement project. Removal of water softeners is a key component of the city’s impending wastewater infrastructure improvement project as their presence is a cause of salty water discharge. Estimated cost of their removal is around a half-million dollars. Council member Brent Pavelko said he thinks water softener removal is something the state should help pay for and he and other council members vowed to take up the issue with local state legislators.”***

According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s announcement in March 2019, “Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz is proposing a statewide Chloride Reduction Program to help communities reduce chloride that ends up in water resources. To pay for the program, Walz included \$600,000 from the Clean Water Fund, derived from the Legacy Amendment sales tax, in his budget recommendations.

“Chloride is a permanent pollutant that is toxic to aquatic life and does not break down or change over time. The chloride water quality standard designed to protect aquatic life is 230 mg/liter (equivalent to 1 teaspoon in 5 gallons of water). Once chloride enters lakes, streams, wetlands and groundwater, it is extremely expensive to remove it. Chloride levels are continuing to increase in Minnesota’s water resources and the only way to address this pollutant is to reduce it at the source. The primary sources of chloride causing water quality problems are deicing salt used in winter and salt used for water softening systems.” (Per the MPCA announcement).

The MPCA would administer the program, taking a two-prong approach:

- Reducing road salt runoff by training snow removal and deicing services to reduce their salt use. Called Smart Salt Training, this pilot program was funded by a federal grant that expires in 2020, and was offered only in the Twin Cities metro area. The state program would continue it for two years and expand it statewide.
- Reducing chloride in wastewater discharges through grants to communities to help residents upgrade their water softeners to low-salt use systems, or if the communities centrally soften their water, to help with removing unnecessary water softeners. More than 100 communities in Minnesota have elevated chloride in their wastewater discharge, in large part due to water softening. Because most wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove chloride, and retrofitting such plants with chloride treatment would be prohibitively expensive, the state needs creative approaches to address these salty discharge problems.

The final budget will be decided by the 2019 Minnesota Legislature.

MWQA’s legislative team at Gray, Plant Mooty has introduced a bill that would appropriate \$400,000 in both 2020 and 2021 to establish a statewide program to reduce chlorides. \$100,000 would be set aside for grants to optimize existing water softener units or upgrade to low-salt use systems. This bill, HF2740, is currently being reviewed by the Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division.

***You can search the Clean Water Fund listing to track projects in your area [here](#). 2020 funding projects are currently being considered and will be announced this fall.***

MWQA is also working hand-in-hand with MPCA, and is making significant headway. Working towards a common goal of educating the public on ways to reduce chloride also benefits the environment, consumers, and the industry. Holding community events, partnering with the MPCA at the State Fair, and building a traveling water softener display are just some of the recent projects MWQA and the MPCA have completed.

Centralized water treatment will not give communities “soft” water; residents will only see a reduction in hardness. Consumers will see a savings in salt use, but enjoying all the benefits of soft water can only be achieved with a water softener. Businesses and households alike can all take steps to immediately have a positive impact on chloride discharge by optimizing their softeners with the help of an MWQA member.

MWQA members need to stress to customers the importance of having water treatment equipment inspected on a regular basis, and make a high efficient water softener a priority for those purchasing or renting new equipment. These are all ways to impact chloride discharge. It’s important to understand

that the #1 culprit for chloride discharge is road salt, and water softeners are a distant fourth on the list. Both the state and University of Minnesota are actively pursuing solutions to reduce the amount of chloride used on our roadways, and positive results are being found and implemented through this partnership.

What can YOU do? Get involved with our Association, attend a board meeting, work on a committee! Watch your city council meetings for indications of upcoming water treatment projects. Call or email us today to get involved in this important issue that affects all of us!

**Scott Schiesser, MWQA President**

## Now Is A Great Time To Join The MWQA

**By Mike Herman, Past MWQA President**

As we again face the hurdle of ensuring that proper language is submitted or added to prospective legislation, I am grateful for those who continue to donate their time, energy and provide financial support to MWQA. We are once again faced with legislation that could make it difficult and even limit what we are able to do as water conditioning professionals.

We faced a similar challenge in 2016, and need MWQA members, as well as others in our profession, willing to dedicate time, provide for legal expenditures, and actively reach out to key state legislators to present our case. If we do not step up to meet this challenge, language contained in proposed legislation will make it more difficult for our profession and could even limit some of the things that we currently do.

**Call To Action**– I would ask that each of you look at the impact proposed legislation could have on you and your business. Please consider donating to the MWQA legal fund, be prepared to reach out to your state legislator and consider becoming personally involved in this much-needed initiative. For more information please contact an MWQA Board member. If you are still not a member, [email us today](#) to get started!

Thank you in advance for your continued support!

## MWQA Convention Is October 1-2, 2019

If you need credit to renew your water conditioning or plumbing license this year, plan to get it through the MWQA in October. You can check your [license status here](#).

We will again offer several classes at our fall convention, allowing you to get both your code credit and technical/other credit to renew your license. We are hoping to offer more code courses this year, as we have several members with plumbing licenses who need additional code credits. We take care of submitting your credits online - all you need to do is register and show up for the class.



**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**MWQA Annual Convention**  
October 1 - 2, 2019  
Arrowwood Resort in Alexandria, MN

**New this year -**  
**\* DAYTIME Vendor Fair\***  
- Continuing Education for  
WC and Plumbing Licenses  
- State License Exams  
(Pending Approval by DOLI)

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The Minnesota Department of Labor & Industry requires that all persons holding Water Conditioning or Plumbing licenses must complete Continuing Education Credits (CEU) during each license cycle in order to renew their license. Check your license today on the DOLI website

<https://secure.doli.state.mn.us/lookup/licensing.aspx>

Credit will also be offered for WQA certifications and Wisconsin licenses.

Alexandria  
Will Host  
MWQA  
Convention  
October 1-2

Registration materials will be available soon on the MWQA website at

[www.mwqa.com](http://www.mwqa.com)

