



Embargoed until 6:30 pm, April 30, 2026

Common Ground Calls For Independent Performance Audit Of Veolia Water Company: Pressures MMSD Board Before \$700 Million, 10-year Contract Decision

On Thursday evening, 200 Common Ground leaders gathered on the lakefront to press the [Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's \(MMSD\) Board of Commissioners](#) to undertake an independent, third-party performance audit of Veolia, the for-profit company that manages the MMSD wastewater treatment facilities. This comes before MMSD's Board votes on a 10-year, \$700 million contract in September, in which Veolia and Jacobs Solutions have submitted bids.

Common Ground (CG), a powerful, broad-based alliance of [46 member institutions across greater Milwaukee](#)—including congregations, schools, non-profits, small businesses and neighborhood groups—revealed the results of its 5-month investigation, which was sparked by a 2023 whistleblower letter from a former, high-level MMSD employee alleging serious mismanagement practices by Veolia.

Steve Jacquart, who worked for MMSD for nearly 19 years as its Intergovernmental Relations Coordinator, came forward as the whistleblower, declaring: "I'm here tonight because I strongly believe that taxpayers have a right to know about any actions that threaten public health and the environment." Prior to MMSD, Jacquart served as Milwaukee Mayor Norquist's Chief of Staff and Policy Director, and Deputy Commissioner of the Department of City Development.

According to Jacquart, "In 2016, Jones Island and South Shore Wastewater Treatment Facilities had massive breakdowns with processing biosolids—the organic materials derived from treated sewage sludge through the wastewater treatment process. This breakdown has resulted in reduced wastewater treatment capacity during rain storms, increasing the risk of sewage overflows and basement backups, which can also increase the volume of sewage that is released into our rivers and Lake Michigan when we have overflows."

"Despite being known," Jacquart added, "this information has never been released to the public or presented to the MMSD Commission in a coherent manner. There is a full record of correspondence on this problem between MMSD senior staff and Veolia from 2017 through 2020. MMSD Commissioners owe it to themselves and taxpayers to fully understand what caused the unprecedented problems at the two wastewater treatment facilities before they vote on the next \$700 million, 10-year operating contract."

For 5 months, CG volunteer leaders have been investigating the information brought forth by Jacquart by talking with 16 current and former employees, meeting with decision-makers, and reviewing hundreds of pages of FOIA records.

“We found credible evidence that the MMSD wastewater plants are not running at peak capacity—increasing the risk of sewage backing up into our basements or being dumped into our lake,” said Bob Connolly, Co-Chair of CG’s Environmental Research Team.

CG leaders shared statements from the confidential interviews they conducted with 16 current and former MMSD and Veolia employees. These interviews reveal a pattern of mismanagement and corroborate Jacquart’s allegation that the wastewater treatment plants are not operating at peak efficiency particularly during storms. Statements include:

- “South Shore does **not run at peak efficiency** during storms.”
- “South Shore does not run at full capacity – **ever.**”
- “Effluent **standards were raised** to allow Veolia to stay in contract compliance.” (Effluent standards are the amount of pollution allowed into the lake.)
- “Veolia made major changes in the treatment process in 2017 **to save themselves money** without consulting MMSD engineers. When MMSD engineers discovered the change in the chemical process used for biosolids management, **Veolia refused their demands** to change back to the previously used process.”
- “Veolia does not care about **lake dumps**. They say the mussels will eat the crap.”
- “The whole maintenance system is designed for ‘**run to fail.**’ Veolia makes more money replacing equipment than maintaining equipment.”
- “South Shore plant is **unsafe** for workers because of lack of maintenance”
- “Plant maintenance is in bad shape – **only 30% of preventative maintenance is being done.**”

“There are many great, talented people who work at or used to work at MMSD and Veolia. I know that many of these workers would like to speak up, but are afraid to do so,” Jacquart explained. “Conducting an independent, third-party performance audit would give workers the opportunity to tell us what they think about the management of our wastewater system. It’s absolutely critical that these perspectives be documented and shared directly with the MMSD Commission.”

“Mismanagement impacts events like the one we experienced this month where 2.7 billion gallons of untreated sewage was dumped into our rivers and Lake Michigan,” asserted Brandon Pinion, Co-Chair of CG’s Environmental Research Team.

“Common Ground is calling upon the MMSD Board of Commissioners to hire a third-party, independent expert to undertake a performance audit of Veolia’s management of our wastewater facilities over the past 18 years. We as customers and taxpayers have paid Veolia close to \$1 billion dollars to manage our facilities, and they have never had an independent performance audit. Now is the time to audit Veolia’s performance before the Commissioners vote in September on which company will win a new, 10-year operating contract,” said Connolly.

“When 16 sources all make similar allegations, they should be taken seriously,” concluded Connolly. “If you smell smoke, you should check for fire. There is ample time. If Veolia is doing a good job, they should welcome an audit. We are volunteers seeking the truth. We need an expert to evaluate. Our Lake is precious. We must protect it.”

Common Ground has not taken a position on which company—Jacobs or Veolia—should get the contract.

Common Ground encouraged anyone with first-hand knowledge of mismanagement to call their WHISTLEBLOWER HOTLINE (414) 751-0755.

Contact: Bob Connolly at bconnolly@jamescompany.com or 414-491-5910

Website & Video: commongroundwi.org

Logistics: Thursday, April 30th, 6:30 to 8:00 pm
War Memorial, 750 N Lincoln Memorial Drive

Background: [Veolia Position and Background Paper](#)

[Request for Performance Audit](#)

[Testimony from Whistleblower](#)

[Letter to Commissioners](#)

Veolia’s contract with MMSD is the [largest public-private wastewater treatment contract in North America](#).

CG previously created the [Water Drop Alert System](#), which MMSD now operates.

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