



# COMMON GROUND'S INVESTIGATION REPORT: 20 Whistleblowers Expose MMSD's and Veolia's Mismanagement of Milwaukee's Wastewater Treatment Facilities

June 11, 2026

## Background

In September of 2023, Common Ground received an anonymous letter from a former MMSD employee asking us to investigate the mismanagement of the wastewater treatment facilities by Veolia, an international, for-profit company based in Paris, France. The author asserted that Veolia is not running the facilities at capacity during rainstorms and thus needless amounts of wastewater are being dumped into Lake Michigan or backed up into basements.

In 2023, Common Ground did not have capacity to follow up on the letter because we were running a major campaign to reform the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM). However, by the fall of 2025, Common Ground formed a Water Team and began investigating the whistleblower's claims.

On April 30th, after talking with many experts, stakeholders, and current and former Veolia and MMSD employees, we had enough evidence to go public and call for an independent, third-party performance audit of Veolia's management practices and the supervision of Veolia by MMSD. Since then more whistleblowers have come forward.

Common Ground is a powerful non-profit, non-partisan alliance of 45 congregations, schools, non-profits, small businesses and neighborhood groups with a 18-year history of effectively addressing critical social issues in Southeastern Wisconsin.

## This Report

We have talked individually with 30 current and former MMSD and Veolia employees who have confirmed and expanded the assertions made in the original whistleblower letter. Twenty of these individuals provided enough information for us to include them in this report—seven are listing their name publicly. Common Ground put in writing the evidence we have gathered, which documents numerous areas of concern and the serious nature of the mismanagement practices we have uncovered:

- 1) **FALSIFIED EQUIPMENT RECORDS:** Equipment is not being properly maintained and maintenance records and work orders are being falsified or deleted.

- 2) **FACILITIES BELOW CAPACITY:** Equipment is being allowed to deteriorate and fail; thus facilities cannot operate at peak capacity even during rain storms when it's most needed.
- 3) **FALSIFIED WATER REPORTS:** Water quality reports are being falsified. Milorganite quality control reports are also being "fudged." Veolia has reduced testing for PCBs in Milorganite to save money.
- 4) **SEWAGE DUMPS INACCURATE:** The amount of sewage being dumped into the lake or diverted into the Deep Tunnel is not being reported accurately.
- 5) **UNSAFE CONDITIONS:** Workers are made to endure unsafe working conditions.
- 6) **LOW, UNQUALIFIED STAFFING:** Proper staffing levels are not being maintained. Unqualified persons are employed, compromising safety and efficiency.
- 7) **NO OVERSIGHT:** MMSD staff are not properly monitoring Veolia's management of the facilities.

This report is organized around the testimony of each individual that has come forward, either publicly or confidentially. Common Ground's goal is to offer a true picture of Veolia's mismanagement practices taking place in the MMSD facilities and the inadequate oversight by MMSD staff. Many of these Whistleblowers are willing to speak to performance auditors in a confidential setting.

#### **Whistleblower #1 – Steve Jacquart**

Steve wrote the original, anonymous letter to Common Ground and eventually identified himself to us as we began the investigation. Steve worked for MMSD for 19 years as the Director of Intergovernmental Relations. He reported to the Executive Director of MMSD. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026 Steve appeared publicly at a meeting of 177 Common Ground leaders to offer the [testimony](#) found in Appendix A.

Steve's focus is on the publicly available documents that verify that **the plants are not running at peak efficiency** and that **needless amounts of sewage are being dumped into Lake Michigan** and the treated wastewater MMSD discharges to the lake has become **more polluted over the years**. Steve traces one of the causes, based on correspondence from MMSD's head engineer in the Office of Contract Compliance to Veolia, to Veolia's **change in chemicals** used to manage biosolids that **drastically slowed the treatment process**.

### **Whistleblower #2 – Greg Gryskiewicz**

Greg worked for Veolia for nearly 15 years in a variety of assignments in the operations of the MMSD plants. He left in 2024 because of his ethical concerns about Veolia's mismanagement practices and the lack of oversight by MMSD staff. As he left, he wrote a [7-page report](#) outlining and documenting the poor maintenance and destruction of the plant equipment as well as inadequate staffing levels. Greg spoke publicly of his concerns at a Common Ground press conference on May 11, 2026. A copy of his original 7-page report is found in Appendix B. On May 17, Greg shared with us a more detailed [37-page report](#) further documenting the many problems he has seen at the plants. This report can be found in Appendix C.

### **Whistleblower #3 – Pam Schultz**

Pam worked for 18 years in all aspects of plant operations. She retired in 2021. Pam reported to us on her many experiences with the fear and intimidation practices conducted by the Veolia management staff. She knows and believes there are many good employees who want to operate the plants in an efficient and productive manner but are held back by Veolia management practices centered on saving Veolia money and keeping the staff in line. She had first-hand experience with the Veolia practice of not maintaining equipment and purchasing equipment that became unusable and inoperative. Pam also had direct experience of Veolia "lying about their performance numbers" on many occasions and not reporting all of the sewage dumps into the Lake.

Additionally, Pam read Greg Gryskiewicz's full report and said that the conditions in the secondary building that Greg describes are absolutely true. She took over 100 pictures of that building. It has asbestos in the ceiling tiles. The ceilings were crumbling and falling. She filed an unsafe conditions report with MMSD and Veolia but got no response.

### **Whistleblower #4 – Anonymous**

This person worked for MMSD for 16 years and retired in March of 2025. They had a high-level management position and have written a 30-page report which can be presented to auditors in a face-to-face confidential meeting. They verified that the South Shore plant is not working at peak efficiency and that the inadequate maintenance complaints are absolutely true. MMSD has no system in place for verifying that work orders are delivered and actually implemented. There is only one MMSD person in contract compliance assigned to check on maintenance. Veolia "runs the equipment to fail"; they do not maintain it.

**Whistleblower #5 - Anonymous, current employee**

Has worked at the MMSD plants for Veolia for 21 years. Has pictures and videos of poor maintenance and equipment mismanagement. In the plant that dries and makes Milorganite, the final product was previously tested every day for PCBs. Now it is only tested once a week. This saves Veolia money. At the plants, the Veolia management staff is abusive and intimidating, causing many people to quit or just not work very hard at all.

**Whistleblower #6 - Jacob Holbert**

Worked for Veolia for 13 years, left in 2020 because of what he considered a hostile work environment. He contends Veolia management belittles and harasses employees, especially if they disagree. The commonly used management phrase is "FIFO" ("Fit In or Fuck Off"). Employees never see or talk to MMSD staff. Maintenance is very poor. Equipment is not being fixed. There are no equipment back-ups when something fails. Veolia is fudging the numbers on the quality control for Milorganite. He has documents to verify this. This was being done prior to 2016, and needs to be investigated to determine if this is still happening. He affirms Greg Gryskiewicz's comments.

**Whistleblower #7 - Anonymous**

A former Veolia management employee who worked for the company for 4 years. Left because of excessive unethical behavior on Veolia's part that could not be tolerated. As an example, this person witnessed "pencil whipping" of preventative maintenance documentation—meaning that monthly preventative maintenance was not being done for 6 months but reports were "back dated" to falsify that the maintenance was done each month. This person said that neglected corrective maintenance work frequently led to plant capacity reductions. Penny pinching on chemicals led to unsalable Milorganite. This person said that Veolia managers would bring retribution against employees and that often operator positions either were not filled or filled with unqualified supervisors. Upon this person's departure they gave a number of these details to the MMSD legal staff but said they seemed "uninterested in pursuing anything." This person concluded that Veolia is "advertising treatment flow capacities that they cannot do," verifying that the plants are never running at full capacity.

**Whistleblower #8 - Anonymous**

Worked for Veolia for 1.5 years as a Conveyance Technician and an Instrument Technician. In this job they were checking on flow volumes. Says that they agree that because of Veolia mismanagement, flow optimization is not good; the plants are running at low capacity, and untreated waste is going into Lake Michigan. The main reason is that the plant equipment is not running properly. MMSD hires a number of junior engineers with no experience and little or no supervision running projects. MMSD also

purchases equipment that never gets used. "MMSD has real problems." This person has pictures to support a lot of what he/she saw there.

**Whistleblower #9 - Anonymous**

Worked for MMSD for over 3 decades in water quality and tested the water in all stages of the process. They stated that water quality reports were falsified.

**Whistleblower #10 - Anonymous**

A union official, whose members work for Veolia in the two plants, explained that they have talked to many current and former members who verify that the equipment is "run to fail" and maintenance records are not kept properly.

**Whistleblower #11 - Anonymous**

A high level MMSD employee says that the South Shore plant never runs at capacity. This person is not sure why but said that it SHOULD run at full capacity. Verified that Veolia did change the chemicals used in the treatment process and that there was quite an extensive contentious process for attempting to resolve the issue. The chemicals were changed by Veolia to save money since Veolia pays for the chemicals used in the treatment process. Effluent (pollution) standards were raised by MMSD to allow Veolia to stay in contract compliance.

**Whistleblower #12 - Robert Patterson**

He worked for Veolia for 17 years. 14 of these years were at the South Shore plant. He was a powerhouse operator and retired in 2019. Veolia tried to design new equipment that never worked. They also did not keep a parts inventory that would help with maintenance. Verified many of the other maintenance claim problems.

**Whistleblower # 13 - Anonymous**

These union officials with members working for Veolia want to remain anonymous to protect their members. They describe a culture of retribution by Veolia. Veolia replaces union workers with non-union people in order to save money. Veolia also understaffs the facilities to save money.

**Whistleblower #14 - Robert Blake**

Worked for 20 years for Veolia on piping, controls and pumps. Retired in 2015. Veolia has no incentive to do equipment maintenance. Veolia is a very anti-union company. They offer a stock purchase plan to some employees but not to union members.

**Whistleblower #15 - Anonymous**

Worked for Veolia for 15 years. Left for another job. Was an operations manager. Veolia's management is not very good. They would micro-manage this person's work. South Shore has an aging infrastructure.

**Whistleblower - #16 Anonymous**

Worked for MMSD for 31 years. Retired in 2021. Knew all about the wastewater testing. Veolia would falsify the credentials of people certifying test results of water quality. Veolia does not care about dumps of sewage in the Lake, saying that the mussels will eat the waste. Veolia staff told this person to destroy certain records. They did so but kept a copy before destroying them. Not happy with how Veolia and MMSD ran the facilities. Very nervous about talking publicly about what they know.

**Whistleblower - #17 Anonymous**

Currently works for Veolia. 20 years there. Maintenance is not good at all. Staff is eliminated, making it very hard to keep up with all of the maintenance needs. "Malicious compliance" is the way the equipment is maintained. Work orders "disappear" as do reports on work completion. There used to be 4 people working on preventative maintenance, now there are 2. Veolia has eliminated 40-50% of preventative maintenance work. The operating system is broken. The plants are unsafe for workers because of the lack of maintenance. The plants do not run at peak efficiency, especially during rainstorms. Half of the plant generators do not run properly. Veolia treats the equipment like you would treat a rental car, meaning it's not theirs so "who cares."

**Whistleblower # 18 Anonymous**

Current MMSD employee since 2014. Reported to us about careless maintenance. Gages are broken. The Northwest side relief sewer is not fixed. In this relief sewer it can't be determined how much water is being diverted. In all of this person's years they have never seen South Shore run at full capacity. "Everyone knows about the mismanagement. It's the honest truth." Kevin Shafer is not held accountable for mismanagement by Veolia.

**Whistleblower #19 Anonymous**

Has worked for MMSD for 15 years. Knows water lab readings are supposed to be done quarterly and annually. Veolia squeezes these readings into only 3 or fewer but charges for 5. Many of the MMSD people would like to get rid of Veolia but they do not have the power to do so.

**Whistleblower #20 - Jim Robertson**

Heard about Greg Gryskiewicz's testimony and called us to say he will testify and that what Greg is saying is absolutely true. Jim worked in maintenance for 13 years from 2007 until 2020 when he retired. He was a machinist (in the union) and worked at Jones Island. He says MMSD lets Veolia get away with "everything." Veolia "runs the equipment to fail." They have no incentives to maintain the equipment. He would write up preventative maintenance orders and things would never get fixed. Basically, he was

not able to do his job. Veolia got a 10% mark-up fee when they were replacing equipment, so fixing equipment was not in their interest.

The original Jones Island plant was built with a lot of redundancy so that if something went down, there was a back-up. Over the years Veolia let all of this go and now there is little or no redundancy in equipment.

### **Summary**

It is undeniable that the MMSD wastewater facilities do not ever run at full capacity and have not done so for some time. We have also verified this through the MMSD website, particularly during the April 2026 rain event which led to an overflow into Lake Michigan.

To recap, here are the areas of mismanagement that our whistleblowers have identified that have caused this problem of underperformance and more:

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