

Carlsbad celebrates recycled water plant's opening

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By: BARBARA HENRY - Staff Writer

CARLSBAD ---- With machinery providing a constant hum in the background, Carlsbad officials officially dedicated a new water recycling facility Wednesday morning.

Surrounded by pipes, filter systems and chemical storage tanks, officials celebrated what they called a guaranteed water source even in times of drought. The new \$10 million plant gives treated wastewater an extra cleansing so it can be used to irrigate landscaping along freeways, on city roadway medians and around private businesses.

Technically, construction ended months ago, but the plant couldn't be pressed into operation until the Encina Wastewater Authority completed a companion project nearby. Work on that \$12.6 million project ---- called a Flow Equalization/Joint Use Facility ---- concluded late last month.

After extensive tests both facilities are now operational, and Encina and Carlsbad officials hosted separate dedication ceremonies Wednesday.

"Our staff's looking forward to working with Carlsbad," said Mike Hogan, Encina's general manager.

Carlsbad's new water recycling plant will allow the city to more than double the number of customers purchasing reclaimed water ---- intensely treated sewage ---- for irrigation purposes, said Bill Plummer, a deputy city engineer. Currently, the city has 225 water customers, including Legoland, using reclaimed water on their trees and flowers, he said.

Plans call for Carlsbad to take about 4 million gallons of treated wastewater a day from Encina's treatment plant next door. Right now, that treated wastewater is poured into the Pacific Ocean and sometimes during peak rainy periods the water flow is more than the outflow pipe can handle, Encina officials have said.

Because of that, they built the Flow Equalization Facility. It acts as a holding area for water. In the summer, Carlsbad can use it for its recycled water program. In the winter, Encina will use it.

"They were originally going to develop their own tank and we said, 'Wait a minute,' "

Hogan said.

Carlsbad plans to give most of the water it receives from Encina treatment through a granular media filtration system ---- tanks filled with sand. The remainder ---- about 25 percent ---- will receive a more extensive treatment that includes a microfiltration system and a reverse-osmosis process. It's a small-scale version of the intensive filtering system desalination plants use to turn salt water into sea water and it will help reduce salts in the water, officials have said.

The facility is automated, so there will be no on-site staff, Plummer said. It's taken weeks to get the system operating correctly, but now the more than 60 sensors are working properly, he said.

Contact staff writer Barbara Henry at (760) 901-4072 or bhenry@nctimes.com.