

The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Letters to the editor

December 7, 2005

Nothing secret, nothing bad about water recycling

Regarding "Water plan secretly pushed, suit says" (Local, Nov. 23):

As director of the Water Reuse Study, I would like to clarify the process the Water Department has used in implementing the study's directive from the City Council on Jan. 13, 2004.

With that action, the council gave us our "marching orders" and specifically laid out six options for the Water Department to pursue: groundwater storage, expanding the dual-piping distribution system, reservoirs for reclaimed water, live stream discharge, wetlands development and reservoir augmentation. Advanced treatment to the tertiary level of recycled water currently produced at the city's plants would be required for reservoir augmentation and some uses of groundwater storage.

In addition to these six, we were also asked to consider any other viable options to increase recycled water use in the city and also investigate the use of gray water by homes and businesses as a way to reduce wastewater discharges into the ocean. All literature, Web site content, community presentations, study video, etc., have stated that all six options are being researched by the Water Department and its consultant team.

The study's Web site was launched in August 2004. We have had an active speakers bureau with over 90 community presentations to date. Over 30 individual interviews have been conducted with community leaders. And a 67-member stakeholder group called the City of San Diego Assembly on Water Reuse (also called the American Assembly) held two intensive workshops.

There have been several media releases and, prior to November 2005, three front-page articles on the study in the Union-Tribune. A 25-minute educational video has been airing on City TV24 since October.

The study has hardly been a secret in San Diego. Study documents are posted on our Web site, including the interim report reviewed by the Water Reuse stakeholder group this July. The adopted statements from each stakeholder group workshop are also posted on the Web site.

I wish to assure the community that absolutely every activity of the Water Reuse Study 2005 has been documented openly. There have been no ongoing "secret plans" to reactivate the water purification project of the 1990s. If the City Council decides that the reservoir augmentation option, one of the six presented in the final study report, is a viable one, then the Water Department will be given "new marching orders" and not before.

MARSI A. STEIRER
Deputy Director for Water Policy and Strategic Planning
City of San Diego