

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

## Yuck! San Diego should flush “toilet to tap” plan

UNION-TRIBUNE EDITORIAL  
July 24, 2006

Your golden retriever may drink out of the toilet with no ill effects. But that doesn't mean humans should do the same.

San Diego's infamous “toilet to tap” plan is back once again, courtesy of Water Department bureaucrats who are prodding the City Council to adopt this very costly boondoggle. The project was rightly shelved seven years ago amid a public outcry over potential health hazards and the fact that some of San Diego's least affluent neighborhoods were to be the recipients of the treated wastewater.

You know the zealots behind the “toilet to tap” initiative are trying to put something over on you when they change the name to “reservoir augmentation” – a euphemism intended to obscure the nasty fact that the project would take heavily contaminated sewage water, purify it and send it through your tap for human consumption.

Put aside for a moment the reality that most San Diegans do not want their water rates raised through the stratosphere to pay for this \$238 million plan to dump treated sewage water into the San Vicente Reservoir. Regardless of public opinion, there are far better ways for San Diego to boost its water supply.

For example, the landmark San Diego-Imperial Valley water transfer, to be accomplished by lining the All-American Canal and other conservation measures, will provide an additional 200,000 acre-feet a year for the region. That's enough water for 1.6 million San Diegans. And the cost of this supply is roughly one-third that of “toilet to tap” water.

Another promising, much less expensive source of additional water is desalination. Both the County Water Authority and the city of Carlsbad are moving forward with seawater desalination plans that would create up to 50 million gallons a day of safe drinking water. What's more, this source too will cost consumers only about one-third what “toilet to tap” water would cost.

Yet another, more sensible option is to use reclaimed wastewater for irrigation and some industrial uses. The level of treatment needed for these purposes is much less expensive than that needed to convert sewage water into drinking water.

In a key study, the respected National Research Council concluded that turning toilet water to tap water should be only “an option of last resort” because “many uncertainties are associated with assessing the potential health risks of drinking reclaimed water.” The study also noted that “one concern about potable reuse of reclaimed water is the potential health risk from little known or unknown pathogens.”

San Diegans do not need to run the risks associated with drinking toilet water. The City Council should reject this project once and for all.