

SANDIEGONEWSROOM

TOILET-TO-TAP CAMPAIGN APPROVED BY COUNCIL JANUARY 28, 2010

The San Diego City Council voted 5-3 to approve a \$3.28 million contract this week to fund a public outreach campaign that will educate residents on the benefits of using recycled wastewater. Bay Area-based RMC Water and Environment will manage the project and the San Diego-based public relations firm Katz & Associates will handle public outreach.

The project is the result of the 2005 Water Reuse Study, which sought ways to maximize water reuse at the North City reclamation facility. If the new public awareness campaign is successful, a full-scale advanced water treatment project could provide the city with up to 16 million gallons of water per day by adding recycled water from the North City plant to the San Vicente Reservoir.

Recognizing the importance of local drought-proof water supplies, a number of San Diego-based groups came together to form the Indirect Potable Reuse (IPR) Coalition, including San Diego Coastkeeper, San Diego Taxpayers Association, San Diego regional Chamber of Commerce, San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, and BIOCOMM. The IPR Coalition encouraged councilmembers to vote in favor of the contract.

San Diego currently imports almost 80 percent of its water from outside the region, according to Coastkeeper Executive Director Bruce Reznik, who addressed the city council on Tuesday. This campaign seeks to lessen the city's reliance on energy and expensive imported water. "Our over reliance on these sources has tremendous environmental and economic impacts on our region," Reznik said.

The outreach campaign is a fully-funded, two-year project that will help residents understand the concept and process of IPR. It will show whether treated wastewater can increase local reservoirs.

“Recycling wastewater into drinking water is a reliable, cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to enhance our local water supplies,” said Reznik.

While everyone agrees that San Diego needs to lessen its reliance on imported water, many are skeptical that IPR is the best means to do so.

Before Tuesday’s vote, Councilwoman Sherri Lightner disagreed with IPR’s effectiveness, saying there are better alternatives to reduce water use.

Mayor Jerry Sanders has referred to the project as “toilet-to-tap” and vetoed the city council’s approval of the demonstration project in 2007. If the program works, then a full-scale IPR program may be instituted, but no treated wastewater will be used in the city’s water supply during the demonstration.