

City panel OKs reclaimed, water study

Action could help resolve lawsuit

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Under pressure, a City Council committee agreed yesterday that the city should commission a one-year study on how to increase the use of water reclaimed from sewage, including adding it to a reservoir.

The unanimous recommendation from the Natural Resources and Culture Committee will go to the full City Council in December.

The study's cost isn't known yet, said Marsi Steirer, a deputy director of the Water Department.

A coalition of local environmental groups calling themselves the Bay Council asked for the study while negotiating to settle a lawsuit filed over the level of sewage treatment done by the city's Point Loma wastewater plant.

Attorney Marco Gonzalez, local chairman of the Surfrider Foundation and a representative of the Bay Council, said a settlement could be reached if the city would agree to study reclaimed water use.

Much of the reclaimed water now sold by the city is used for irrigation. The study would revisit a plan to add reclaimed water to a drinking-water reservoir.

In the 1990s, the city spent \$15 million to explore "water repurification," also known as the "toilet-to-tap" project. Amid public opposition, the council killed the \$154 million project in 1999.

Former state Assemblyman Howard Wayne and former City Councilman Bruce Henderson opposed spending more money to study the toilet-to-tap idea. Both said they fear that drinking reclaimed sewage water would pose health risks even if it underwent several treatments to remove pathogens.

Councilwoman Donna Frye asked that the study examine potential health risks, particularly those that might be posed by antibiotics, estrogen and other pharmaceuticals in the water.

Frye and Councilmen Ralph Inzunza, Charles Lewis, Jim Madaffer and Michael Zucchet sit on the Natural Resources and Culture Committee.

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