

## Letters to the editor

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August 27, 2004

### City studies recycled water opportunities

The article "Few thirst for recycled tap water, survey says" (News, Aug. 16) addresses the results of a public opinion survey recently conducted by the San Diego County Water Authority.

We are pleased that the public expressed strong support for the use of recycled water in many settings.

However, the statements attributed to Dave Schubert, a scientist at the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, regarding disinfection levels and the safety of recycled water in proximity to humans have no correlation to the city's current recycled water system. As no specifics are mentioned, Union-Tribune readers could easily draw the conclusion that these alleged concerns relate to our system, as the city is the only agency mentioned.

The Water Department has delivered high quality recycled water from the North City Water Reclamation Plant since 1997. The state of California and the county Department of Health require strict monitoring at the plant before recycled water is distributed. We consistently monitor the recycled water quality in the delivery system – an extra step not required – to be sure the water is absolutely safe, and work closely with our customers to be sure there are no water quality problems.

There are 17 agencies in San Diego County distributing recycled water. Many homeowner associations use it to irrigate common landscaped areas. In addition to several industrial uses, it is also used to irrigate parks, schools and fill recreational lakes.

The article mentions the city's repurification project of the 1990s, which has been inaccurately portrayed as "toilet to tap" in the local media. It is time for the media to do away with this misnomer; it is misleading, inaccurate and inhibits thoughtful public dialogue on water recycling options.

The project would have provided additional steps of advanced treatment to fully treated recycled water produced by the North City Water Reclamation Plant, and would then have blended this "repurified" water with supplies stored in the San Vicente Reservoir. After a waiting period of approximately one year, this water would then be treated in a drinking water filtration plant, a process called "reservoir augmentation." The project was not "sprung" on the public, as extensive public outreach occurred over several years.

As directed by the City Council earlier this year, the Water Department began the Water Reuse Study to analyze all opportunities to increase the use of recycled water in the city. The comprehensive, impartial, balanced and science-based review has an independent scientific advisory board, public involvement and opinion-gathering components. The final report will present analyses of all opportunities: expanding the existing distribution system, adding storage reservoirs, discharging recycled water into flowing streams, developing wetlands, recharging groundwater basins and after additional advanced treatment, blending with water stored in reservoirs that are used as drinking water sources (reservoir augmentation.)

The final report will present information and analysis on all recycled water opportunities to the City Council. The public can find out more about the study at [www.sandiego.gov/water/waterreustudy](http://www.sandiego.gov/water/waterreustudy).

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Water Reuse Study 2005

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