

## 'Toilet to tap' proposal calls for recycled water for San Diego

By: JOE BRITTON - North County Times wire services

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SAN DIEGO - Treated sewage would be used to augment reservoirs used to supply drinking water to San Diego's increasingly growing population in a plan presented to a City Council committee today.

The proposal, dubbed "toilet to tap," is one of six strategies outlined in a nearly \$1 million Water Department plan to increase the amount of recycled water used in San Diego.

The council rejected a similar proposal in 1999.

Without endorsing the plan, the Natural Resources and Culture Committee voted to forward it to the full City Council for consideration.

The year-long study was compiled by a 67-member Assembly on Water Reuse, composed of representatives from the offices of elected officials, community groups, business organizations and environmentalists.

San Diego has had a recycled water program since 1997, which produces about 38 million gallons a day for irrigation and industrial purposes only, Jim Barrett, director of the Water Department, told the committee.

Council President Scott Peters, who is not a member of the committee, but testified at the start of the meeting, said most of the recycled water produced by the Water Department is not used.

"The bulk of this precious resource is dumped into the sanitary sewer system because of the expense of building the 'purple pipe' network," Peters said, referring to the separate pipes now required to move recycled water.

Instead of dumping the unused treated sewage, the plan recommends the city further treat it and add it to drinking water reservoirs.

According to the study, recycled water is being used for potable purposes in El Paso, Texas; Fairfax County, Va.; Singapore and Orange County.

"I just don't think we are in a place where we can turn our backs on a clean, steady and locally produced supply of water," Peters said.

Councilman Kevin Faulconer indicated he would not support the proposal because it would be too cost prohibitive.

"For me, most of this comes down to cost and I just don't know that this will be feasible," Faulconer said.

Faulconer also suggested the idea would not garner public support.

"I don't think we are there yet," Faulconer told the committee. "I don't think the public is there yet."

Mayor Jerry Sanders has also said he would not support the idea.

The plan also suggests the city consider:

- expanding the system for irrigation and industrial customers;
- using recycled water to recharge, improve or protect groundwater basins;
- creating storage reservoirs for recycled water;
- adding recycled water to streams or use it to create wetlands; and
- adding recycled water to aquifers used for drinking water supplies after additional advanced treatment.

According to the report, San Diego imports about 85 percent of its water from the Colorado River and Northern California and demand is expected to grow by about 25 percent by 2030.

Much of what is imported into the city is already tainted with treated or recycled wastewater, according to Councilwoman Donna Frye.

"The citizens of San Diego are, in fact, drinking treated wastewater," Frye said.  
"It's something that is happening now."