

**FL residents to decide on drinking reclaimed water**

## **Tampa to ask voters whether they want reclaimed water in drinking supply**

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TAMPA — Your dog drinks toilet water, but are you willing to do the same? Tampa City Council wants to know.

The council voted Tuesday to ask residents whether they want to put highly treated sewer water back into the city's drinking water supply.

The question will appear on the 2010 ballot.

Council member Charlie Miranda, who supports the idea, made the motion. It was seconded by Linda Saul-Sena, who opposes it.

Both say the issue is important enough to allow voters to directly decide on it.

"It's so significant it should not be made by a board. It should be made by the people in our community," Saul-Sena said. "It's appropriate for the public to weigh in."

Saul-Sena said she worries that even the most highly treated wastewater still contains hormones. She said some studies have shown that when the water makes its way to rivers and lakes, fish end up with both female and male sex organs.

But Miranda said that sewer water can be treated to the point where it's safe to drink. The water can then be returned to the environment where it can be further cleaned by natural processes before making its way to drinking water sources.

Tampa gets most of its drinking water from the Hillsborough River.

"Do we think the Hillsborough River is pristine and clean and there's nothing going on there?" Miranda said.

The river, he said, has bird droppings and animal carcasses in it. Wells are located beneath land littered with cow manure.

"Do we think that any water supply in this country or in the world comes from an area that is 100 percent rid of all things that are bad?" he said. "Absolutely not."

Right now, the city dumps 55 million gallons of reclaimed water a day into Tampa Bay.

The council's vote came at a workshop on a \$340 million plan to find better uses for the water to protect the bay and reduce reliance on drinking water for things like irrigation and industry.

Among other things, the plan calls for requiring people with access to reclaimed water to use it for irrigation starting in December, and increasing water rates for high-volume users to encourage conservation.

The council will vote on both measures in coming weeks.

Plans also include doubling the number of people with access to the water to about 20,000. To pay for the expansion, anyone who lives along the new lines would pay a fee whether or not they use the water.

Another component of the proposal would allow Tampa Bay Water to take the city's reclaimed water to Pasco County to recharge the aquifer. In return, the utility that supplies water to Pinellas, Pasco and Hillsborough counties would help pay for pipes to take reclaimed water to New Tampa.

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