

Coalition has hand in water recycling plan Council advances recycling project

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INDIRECT POTABLE REUSE COALITION

BIOCOM

Building Office Managers Association, [San Diego](#) chapter

Citizens Coordinate for Century 3

Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation

Friends of Infrastructure

Industrial Environmental Association

National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, [San Diego](#) chapter

San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council

San Diego Audubon Society

San Diego Coastkeeper

San Diego County Taxpayers Association

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce

Surfrider Foundation, [San Diego](#) chapter

SAN DIEGO — An unusually diverse coalition of community groups last night helped persuade the San Diego City Council to keep moving ahead on a landmark water recycling plan.

Environmentalists, labor leaders, business officials, taxpayer advocates, building managers and engineering professionals lent their combined support to an \$11.8 million pilot project to turn wastewater into drinking water.

“Early on, someone suggested that we call ourselves the Unprecedented Coalition because of the diverse membership,” said Lani Lutar, head of the San Diego County Taxpayers Association and a member of the Indirect Potable Reuse Coalition.

The alliance officially formed last summer when Lutar was talking with Bruce Reznik at San Diego Coastkeeper about how to swing council votes and public opinion on what has been a touchy subject. It now boasts 13 member organizations, including high-profile groups such as the Surfrider Foundation and the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

In recent weeks, coalition members have visited council offices, given community presentations, researched ways to address council concerns and written a joint letter supporting the \$3.28 million contract approved last night as part of the overall demonstration program.

The money will pay for a private company, RMC of Walnut Creek, to manage the project and educate residents about water recycling.

Reznik and other backers viewed the 5-3 vote as a referendum on indirect potable reuse, the formal name for putting highly treated sewage back into the drinking-water system. It’s also called reservoir augmentation.

The pilot project is designed to show whether modern water-cleaning technologies pass muster with state health officials. It doesn’t include injecting recycled water into a reservoir, which would happen if the city moves forward with a full-blown system.

Every council vote on the issue is important because water reuse has proved a tough sell in San Diego since the late 1990s, when it was dubbed “toilet to tap” and killed by the City Council. In December 2007, the council reversed course and overrode Mayor Jerry Sanders’ veto with a 5-3 vote in favor of the pilot project.

The council later approved a water-rate increase to cover the estimated \$11.8 million expense. It still must sign off on each major contract related to the project.

Council members’ comments last night showed that deep divisions remain about the proposal.

“I don’t necessarily support the concept, but I do support adequate outreach and adequate management,” said Councilman Tony Young, whose vote for the contract was considered pivotal.

Sanders has said reservoir augmentation is expensive and unnecessary given the city’s other water supplies and new technologies such as desalination. On Monday, a mayoral spokesman said Sanders hasn’t changed his stance even though the coalition’s members have urged him to join their side.

“I think it’s just a matter of time before the mayor eventually comes onboard,” Lutar said.

Others have been easier to convince.

“This is an important issue for the San Diego work force,” said Evan McLaughlin, political director for the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council.

“People make too much of this issue of ideological differences,” he said, noting that the labor council has worked with diverse stakeholders in the past.

Lutar said she isn’t aware of any formal opposition to the demonstration project. Another key vote will come this summer, when the City Council is expected to consider a \$7.4 million bill for installation of the water-treatment system.