

# Purifying Sewage: Where the Mayoral Candidates Stand

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No matter who's elected San Diego's next mayor, one big-ticket issue will land on their desk in his or her first term. And it's a smelly one.

San Diego's major sewage treatment plant in Point Loma doesn't meet federal pollution rules and operates under a waiver of the Clean Water Act. The plant needs a waiver every five years; the current one expires in 2015. The city will have to apply for a new one well before then or face a costly \$1.2 billion upgrade.

When San Diego sought its most recent waiver in 2008, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency warned the city to begin planning to reuse sewage and treat it as a resource, not as wastewater.

Instead of importing water from hundreds of miles away, using it once, and then flushing it, the EPA and local environmentalists are pushing the city to recycle sewage. A long-awaited city report released last week established a goal for San Diego to reuse 100 million gallons a day of its sewage in coming decades, roughly equal to 20 percent of the region's supply.

The report calls for the city to build three treatment plants to purify sewage to boost drinking water supplies and reduce flows to the main Point Loma plant. Nothing will happen until the city completes an \$11.8 million pilot study (due early next year) meant to convince health regulators it can safely add the purified water to drinking water reservoirs.

Of the four major mayoral candidates, only City Councilman Carl DeMaio has formally weighed in on recycling sewage, opposing the city's effort to conduct build a demonstration plant used in the pilot study.

So what will San Diego's next mayor do? We asked the candidates. Congressman Bob Filner did not respond.

(Jargon warning! Some candidates called sewage recycling "IPR," which means indirect potable reuse.)

**Councilman Carl DeMaio:** "I support a 'portfolio approach' to securing a reliable water supply for San Diego — as much diversity in the water supply as is financially feasible. I am keeping an open mind and look forward to the public vetting of the city's IPR study. I support the recycling and reuse of wastewater and am committed to working to achieve the goal in a cost-effective

manner. I am confident the City's efforts to advance recycling of water will result in an extension of the current waiver in place for the Point Loma treatment plant."

**District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis:** "The science, I think, shows that it can be as safe for what it's used for. We have a tremendous water shortage. And we have to diversify. One of the ways to diversify is through [indirect potable] reuse."

**Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher:** "I strongly support IPR as a way to decrease the amount of pollution flowing in to the ocean, increase our clean water supply and help San Diego come in to compliance with the federal Clean Water Act. That is why I proposed embracing IPR when I released my clean water plan earlier this year. The initial report to the City Council seems like a good place to start. When I'm mayor I'll work with researchers, businesses and the environmental community to protect our oceans and ensure we have clean, affordable drinking water."

*Staff writer Liam Dillon contributed to this report.*

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