

## Limited drinking water forcing California to make changes, official tells Thousand Oaks audience

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The problem in Southern California is not limited water — there is an entire ocean of water just off the coast.

The problem is that water suitable for drinking is limited and becoming more so. One of the solutions is in the toilet.

That's according to Rich Nagel, general manager of the West Basin Municipal Water District.

"We will never run out of water. That's impossible. But we will run out of drinkable water," Nagel said. "Each and every one of you has drunk sewer water in one way or another."

Nagel spoke to the Association of Water Agencies at the group's meeting Thursday in Thousand Oaks about options to create sources of potable water, especially after recent rulings that limit traditional sources of water.

Sheldon Berger, director of the United Water Conservation District, said water from the San Joaquin Valley is being restricted because of concerns about the endangered Delta smelt and that in Ventura County, water from the Piru Reservoir, which United oversees, is being used to create fish ladders for restoration of the steelhead trout population.

"We are mandated by law to release that water for the trout," said Berger, the association's program chairman.

The agencies are looking for technological solutions to meet demand. A seawater reclamation project in Oxnard is a huge step toward solving some of those issues, according to Berger. Another option is reverse osmosis. A system of superfine filters can strip water down to the molecular level, eliminating virtually all bacteria, viruses, chemicals and other toxins and waste.

One of the biggest problems with developing "toilet -to-tap" technology comes from public perception, Nagel said.

"If we don't start having these conversations today, we won't be ready in 10 to 20 years," he said. "We need a focused outreach program. We are building confidence and building programs from the ground up."

As more water agencies look to desalination and wastewater recycling, the costs continue to drop because of economies in scale, as well as technological advances.

While there is little aversion to desalination, recycling sewer water tends to be met with suspicion if not revulsion.

The filters used to purify water can block almost all known contaminants, Nagel said. The water also is treated with ultraviolet light and hydrogen peroxide, which make it purer than most current tap water.

A bill before state legislators, AB 2398, would remove reverse-osmosis water from the definition of "wastewater" and from the health and safety code, Nagel said. The bill would require an increase in California's recycling goal to 1.5 million acre-feet of water per year by the year 2020 and 2.5 million acre-feet per year by the year 2030.

Berger said that locally, the definitions of "recycled water" and "wastewater" must be changed because farmers cannot use recycled water if they want to sell produce to major food suppliers, which ban the use of wastewater.



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