

CONTRA COST TIMES

Water recycling bill signed into law

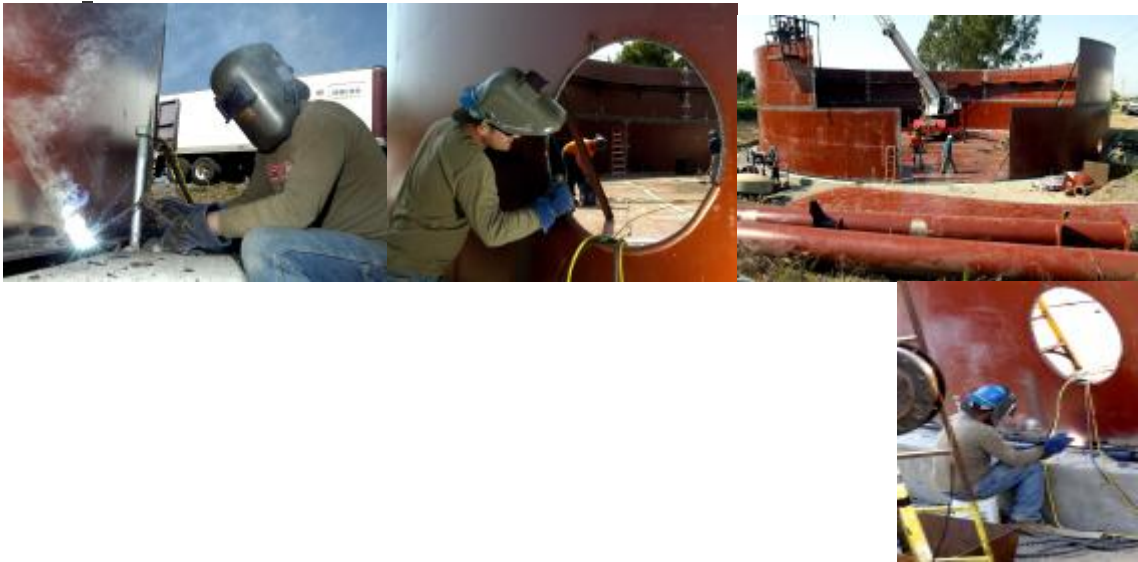
By Simon Read and Paul Bugarino

May 8, 2008 04:53:12 PM PDT



Bret Erickson, of Paso Robles Tank, Inc. & Central Coast Stainless, welds the bottom chime of a big steel water tank being built at the Delta View Golf Course on Thursday, May 8, 2008 in Pittsburg, California.

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In a move that could save Antioch and Pittsburg millions of dollars, President Bush signed a bill Thursday authorizing federal support for Bay Area cities pursuing the development of new water sources.

"This is a great thing," Antioch Mayor Donald Freitas said. "It's clear that California is heading into a severe drought. If it doesn't happen this year, it's going to occur soon."

Under the new law, local water and wastewater agencies will be able to work jointly with the federal government to construct pipelines, treatment facilities and other infrastructure to develop and expand the use of recycled water in the Bay Area. The bill was authored by Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez.

"These water-recycling projects will reduce the demand for precious fresh water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and help municipalities reduce the costs from expensive and scarce fresh water supplies," Miller said in a statement. "... Water recycling offers great potential to states like California that suffer periodic droughts and have limited fresh water supplies."

Other jurisdictions that will benefit from the legislation, according to Miller's office, are Palo Alto, Mountain View, Pacifica, South Santa Clara County, Redwood City and San Jose.

Antioch is working with the Delta Diablo Sanitation District to build 4 miles of distribution piping that will feed recycled water to Lone Tree Golf Course and seven city parks. Phil Herrington, Antioch's director of capital improvements, said it's hoped the project will be completed by fall of 2009 or spring 2010.

The project's estimated cost, according to Delta Diablo, is approximately \$9 million.

"The passing of the bill is going to expedite this whole process," Freitas said. "It provides an insurance policy that we will maintain all our landscaping under drought conditions. In a drought, all landscaping is generally lost — in terms of our parks and golf course, that would be devastating."

Freitas said ceasing landscaping maintenance would cost Antioch millions of dollars in economic development.

"We have to develop alternative supplies of water to meet our future and existing needs," he said.

Reusing treated water helps to preserve the region's river and groundwater supplies, officials said. In addition, treating and reusing wastewater allows urban water systems to improve the overall security and reliability of their water supply.

The legislation opens the door for Bay Area cities to seek federal funding to develop 32,000 acre-feet of new drought-proof water supplies.

"It's a good first step. It's taken us two years to get this far," said Pittsburg Vice Mayor Nancy Parent, who made two trips to Washington to rally support for the bill.

The next step for Pittsburg is to secure federal funding for a \$5.4 million project to build several miles of pipeline that will allow the city to maintain Delta View Golf Course — and a number of municipal parks — with recycled water, rather than drinking water, city officials said.

Pittsburg has been maintaining its landscapes with drinking water for years, City Engineer Joe Sbranti said. The recycled water pipeline is scheduled to be completed by late summer. Until the federal appropriations come through, the Delta Diablo Sanitation District has agreed to pick up the federal portion of the tab as long as Pittsburg pays back the district.

"Every drop we don't have to take out of reservoirs means that we stave off the possibility of water shortages," Parent said.