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California

A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

In Orange County, indirect potable reuse (IPR) is referred to as '*groundwater replenishment,*' '*water purification,*' '*water reclamation*' and '*a Pure Solution.*' It is widely supported by local mayors, state officials, the academic community and more than thirty environmental groups. Along with Singapore's NEWater program, OCWD's 70 MGD (264,950 m^3/d) groundwater replenishment (GWR) project is one of the world's best-known examples how water reclamation can be used to provide a balanced water supply strategy.

Los Angeles County's West Basin Municipal Water District repurifies effluent from the Hyperion Treatment Plant to produce six grades of recycled '*designer water.*' Three of the grades produced exceed state and federal drinking water standards and are used for a variety of industrial applications as well as for barrier water injected into the South Bay's groundwater basin.

Meanwhile, sixty miles south, San Diego County Mayor Jerry Sanders refers to IPR as '*toilet to tap*' and '*recycled sewage.*' A one-year old Water Reuse Study prepared by PBS&J and reviewed in two workshops by a group of community leaders and stakeholders has languished until two weeks ago, when the Mayor finally forwarded it to City Council.

Even as he released the report of council members, the Mayor reiterated his disagreement with its recommendation to augment the City's reservoirs with "treated sewage." Bill Harris, the Mayor's deputy press secretary told *WDR*, "The mayor believes the science [of IPR] is sound, but that it is neither financially nor publicly viable for San Diego. The cost is simply beyond the City's reach."

The Mayor took office in December 2005 with San Diego facing possible bankruptcy. He inherited a city with a crumbling infrastructure and the Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant that continues to discharge 175 MGD of advanced primary treated sewage into the Pacific Ocean under a five-year waiver. According to city attorney Mike Aguirre, the City must either apply for another five-year waiver by December or immediately begin upgrading the plant to meet secondary treatment standards – a project estimated to cost $1 to 1.5 billion.

The City is also facing threats to its water supply, 90 percent of which is imported. One-third of the water used in San Diego comes from Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which is facing severe cutbacks to protect the endangered delta smelt. Shortages in the Colorado River are also expected to have significant impacts.

The City has been involved in litigation over some aspect of its wastewater system almost continuously for the last twenty years, and another lawsuit over another waiver from secondary treatment is virtually certain. According to Marco Gonzalez, a local attorney and environmentalist who spoke with *WDR* on behalf of the Surfrider Foundation and San Diego Coastkeeper, "The Mayor has drawn a line in the sand and clearly won't act unless the City gets sued. We intend to use all legal and political options available to open his eyes."

In a letter to the Mayor, city attorney Aguirre noted that the North City Reclamation Plant has a design capacity of 30 MGD (113,550 m^3/d), although only 6 MGD (22,710 m^3/d) is being reclaimed – almost half of which is discharged to the ocean. He said that local environmental groups have indicated they may forgo litigation over the waiver if the city commits to increased recycling.

Aguirre told *WDR*, "The convergence of the two issues offers us a unique opportunity for relief from having to meet secondary treatment requirements at Point Loma in return for increased water reuse in San Diego."

The lack of mayoral leadership is most evident by the fact that despite a municipal code requiring the City to update its Water Reclamation Master Plan every five years, the last update occurred in 2000. With a potential water crises looming – and two neighboring cities that have successfully implemented reclamation – the City appears to have no plan for what could be a new local, reliable supply of water and continues to paint itself into a corner.

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