North Coast County Water District
Recycled Water Irrigation Project

Frequently Asked Questions about Using Recycled Water

1. What is recycled water?
The California Water Code defines recycled water as "water which, as a result of treatment of waste, is suitable for a direct beneficial use or a controlled use that would not otherwise occur." Water recycling allows water managers to match water quality to specific reuse applications. This reduces the amount of potable water required for non-drinking uses, ensuring that the best and purest sources of water will be reserved for the highest use — public drinking water.

2. Who develops the health standards for recycled water?
The California Department of Health Services (DHS) establishes and enforces the standards for recycled water. DHS has established water quality standards and treatment reliability criteria for recycled water. The North Coast County Water District and customers using the water for irrigation must meet these requirements for recycled water. The California Regional Water Quality Control Board issues water recycling permits based on the established DHS standards.

3. Isn't it a bit risky to experiment with this kind of water in outdoor landscape spaces?
No. Recycling water is long past the experimental stage in this country and throughout the world. It is being used for crop irrigation as well as to water parks, school grounds and other open spaces from Florida to California. San Jose, Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, Santa Rosa, Daly City and other Bay Area communities use it on their parks, schools, median strips, large landscape areas, and golf courses. Recycled water is used also in office parks, for indoor fire protection and toilet flushing in commercial buildings, in fountains and car washes. The Water District staff is licensed through the DHS and is required to receive continuous educational training. We are certified in all aspects of water analysis and water treatment in order to insure that our customers receive safe water.

4. Could recycled water get mixed with the Water District's drinking water supply?
Absolutely not. Pursuant to state law, the Water District will construct a separate recycled water delivery system. There will be no direct inter- or cross connections between the two water systems. Water systems are inspected annually.

5. How will I know if the water I see sprinkling parks and other outdoor spaces is drinking water or recycled water?
Landscaped areas irrigated with recycled water are marked clearly with bilingual signs stating the usage of recycled water.

6. Does recycled water give our landscape sufficient minerals?
Yes. Recycled water can play a major role in the successful management of turf grasses in our area. Because recycled water is produced from municipal wastewater, the large volumes of water needed to maintain adequate turf growth are readily available even during periods of water shortage. The higher nutrient content of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium in recycled water is beneficial to turf grasses. In many cases, turf and other landscape plants will be able to obtain from recycled water all the phosphorous and potassium they require, and a large part of their nitrogen requirement. Sufficient micro-nutrients are also supplied by recycled water.

7. Who is going to pay for the recycled water retrofit connections?
For existing customers, such as landscape irrigation accounts, the Water District's proposed project will pay 100% of most of the connection costs. Complex original systems may present issues that would be looked at on a case-by-case basis. For future new customers, a connection fee will apply and plans for dual piping for landscape irrigation will be required. The Water District and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission will share the overall cost of implementing the program.

8. Does recycled water smell bad?
It is possible some people may detect a slight chlorine odor; however, the odor is usually less than a swimming pool or hot tub.

9. What chemicals are used to treat recycled water?
The same ones that are used to treat drinking water.

10. Will the recycled water be safe for children playing in park areas?

Yes. The California Department of Health Services has determined that tertiary treated water complying with California Title 22 standards is safe. Park areas have been irrigated safely with recycled water with no reported cases of people getting ill.

11. Children play in the parks and sometimes drink from sprinklers. What happens if a child drinks from a sprinkler?
Just as children may swallow some water at a beach, they could swallow some recycled water without getting sick. Adverse health effects from recycled water could appear only if it were ingested in large quantities over an extended period of time; consequently, recycled water is not intended for drinking. There are no reported cases of people getting sick from recycled water.

12. Has anybody ever gotten sick from recycled water?
No. Recycled water is commonly used throughout the country, and there are no reported cases of illness or allergies as a result.

13. What happens if a child falls down in a pool of recycled water and has an open cut? Will the cut get infected?
No. The cut should be cleaned just as would be the case after any fall. Getting dirt into the cut would be more serious than the exposure to recycled water. The treatment process utilized will allow for the presence of a disinfectant to exist in the recycled water in order to protect against infection.

14. What happens if a dog or cat drinks from a recycled water puddle?
Just the same thing that happens when they drink water running down a gutter in the street: no harmful effects. The water will be safer than if the pet drinks from a ditch or pond.

15. Does recycled water cause spots on vehicles?
No. The spots you are referring to are normally the effects of hard water on smooth surfaces. Any type of water will spot cars if allowed to dry on the surface, and water that has more minerals could produce more noticeable spotting. However, irrigation schedules will occur at night and if cars are in driveways, it is unlikely they will be impacted with overspray from sprinklers.

16. Does the Water District plan to test recycled water in the community prior to construction of the project?
Yes. The Water District, in partnership with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, will conduct a pilot test using recycled water to irrigate a practice putting green at Sharp Park Golf Course. The objective of the pilot test is to assess turf sensitivity to recycled water and to develop user & public familiarity with recycled water in the community. The pilot test has been rescheduled to begin in early July and continue through August 2004.

To learn more about recycled water visit some of these web sites:

WateReuse Association
http://www.watereuse.org/Pages/information.html

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - Water Recycling and Reuse: The Environmental Benefits
http://www.epa.gov/region09/water/recycling/index.html

Redwood City - Recycled Water Communities
A brief description of the ways various communities are using recycled water.
http://www.redwoodcity.org/publicworks/water/recycling/recycled_water_projects.htm

Marin Municipal Water District
How the water district is maximizing their supplies through reuse and conservation.
http://www.marinwater.org/maximizingsupplies.html