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Recycled water talk washes over the coast

By *JEANINE GORE*

Half Moon Bay Review

For some, recycled water is the wave of the future - a golden innovation with the potential to rescue California's uncertain water supply and quench the thirst of its booming populous.

For others, it's just plain gross.

Regardless, a growing number of cities, including neighboring Pacifica and Daly City, have developed

recycled-water treatment facilities. Cautiously interested,

many more communities across the state are looking into the idea - including some on the Coastside.

For more than a year, the Sewer Authority Mid-Coast board has been hearing presentations from experts who specialize in the subject. Separately, the Coastside County Water District, which is grappling with increasingly costly and strained Hetch Hetchy supplies, has also been exploring the idea.

The two agencies recently agreed to form committees for a joint discussion about the possibility of bringing recycled water to the coast.

What is recycled water?

Recycled or reclaimed water is the result of a complex set of physical, chemical and biological processes that work together to turn raw sewage into usable - and in some rare cases even drinkable - water.

And, depending on the place, it's used in a number of ways.



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**Question of the
Week**

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In foggy Salinas, recycled water nourishes tender straw-berry and artichoke crops. In burgeoning Orange County, it augments drinking water sources. Closer to home, in sometimes sweltering Redwood City, it irrigates public landscape projects.

The treatment process is divided into three levels of intensity, known as primary, secondary and tertiary, with the latter being the most intense.

That "third" level of filtration is suitable for dozens of uses.

In most cases, "tertiary water" is used for irrigation - feeding golf courses, cemetery lawns, public landscaping projects, highway medians and, to some extent, agriculture.

Less often, reclaimed water is used in lieu of precious drinking water in commercial car washes, laundries and certain air conditioning facilities. It is also used for flushing toilets, making snow for ski areas, making newsprint and concrete, hosing down landfills and dying carpets.

Soaking up the pros and cons

"Water's too precious to use just once," said Bob Castle, water quality manager for Marin Municipal Water District, which has one of the oldest recycling systems in Northern California. It was installed in 1979, supplying 330 customers.

Castle is a staunch proponent of the process. He believes that using drinking water for non-drinking purposes is a waste.

"Just like recycling bottles, cans, newspapers, cardboard - we should do the same with water," he said.

By reusing water, the amount of treated sewage that dumps into the ocean each day is reduced. Furthermore, it preserves important and limited drinking supplies for their intended, "higher purpose," he contends, adding that tertiary water is perfectly safe.

"The practice is very widespread around the country - if it's harmful show me the harm," he said.

Coming next week: Despite the perceived advantages, not everyone sees recycled water as a panacea.