

State of California
Regional Water Quality Control Board
San Diego Region

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
(October 10, 2012)

ITEM: 5

SUBJECT: Status of Recycled Water Use in the San Diego Region
(Julie Chan)

PURPOSE: Information exchange and discussion with Recycled Water Agencies on plans for increased production and use of recycled water, and completion of Salt and Nutrient Management Plans.

RECOMMENDATION: There is no recommendation as this is an information item and the Board will take no action.

KEY ISSUES:

1. Increasing production and use of recycled water in the San Diego Region is critical to a sustainable water supply.
2. Recycled water agencies produced and reused more recycled water in 2011 than in 2010. Still, over half of the recycled water was disposed of, demonstrating the need for more recycled water reuse projects. One of the most important projects under development is the City of San Diego's San Vicente Reservoir Augmentation Project.
3. An impediment to permitting recycled water irrigation projects is the lack of understanding of the salt and nutrient assimilative capacity of our groundwater basins. Salt and Nutrient Management Plans, required by the Recycled Water Policy, should remove this impediment.
4. In spite of incentives, overall progress on preparation of the plans by recycled water agencies and their stakeholders has been slow.

DISCUSSION: Increasing the production and use of recycled water is imperative for decreasing our dependence on imported water and for a sustainable water supply for the San Diego Region. Approximately 71 to 80 percent of the Region's water supply is imported from either the Sacramento-San

Joaquin River Delta or the Colorado River. Although the environmental damage to these river systems from water exports is well documented, the use of this water in our Region also has adverse consequences. These include the hydromodification of streams, increases in salt and nutrient concentrations in groundwater, and changes from salt to fresh water conditions in coastal lagoons.

Recycled water agencies in the San Diego Region produced and reused more recycled water in 2011 than in 2010, reversing a 3-year decline. Still, over half of the recycled water was disposed of rather than reused demonstrating the need for more recycled water reuse projects.

The City of San Diego is the Region's largest producer of recycled water. The production and reuse of recycled water is necessary for the City to meet total suspended solids emissions requirements in its wastewater discharge to the Pacific Ocean through the Point Loma ocean outfall. In order to reuse more of the recycled water it produces, the City is conducting a pilot project to explore the feasibility of putting highly treated recycled water directly into its San Vicente Reservoir to use for drinking water. The City will need to work with staff for the next several years to complete a report of waste discharge for the full scale project which would store up to 15,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water in the reservoir.

The San Diego Water Board has a role in facilitating recycled water use because the Board must issue water reclamation requirements, master reclamation permits, or waste discharge requirements (collectively permits) for recycled water projects. An impediment to issuing permits for recycled water irrigation projects has been the lack of understanding of the groundwater flow systems and assimilative capacity of our groundwater basins. These basins absorb salts and nutrients from many sources including recycled water landscape irrigation projects, onsite waste water treatment system discharges, and deep percolation of applied agricultural irrigation water. Thus, the Recycled Water Policy requires recycled water agencies and their stakeholders to prepare and implement Salt and Nutrient Management Plans. Implementation of the plans should ensure that recycled water projects are expediently permitted, and that groundwater quality will support the beneficial uses of our basins for the long term.

In exchange for recycled water agencies taking on the burden of preparing and implementing Salt and Nutrient Management Plans, the Policy provides for streamlined permitting of landscape irrigation projects by the Regional Water Boards. According to the Policy, landscape irrigation projects must be considered for adoption by Regional Water Boards within 120 days of deeming an application complete. Furthermore, project proponents cannot be required to monitor surface water or groundwater because the Plans will include basin wide monitoring provisions. During the interim time period when plans are under preparation, project specific monitoring need not be conducted as long as the project proponent is actively participating in the planning or implementation process.

For groundwater recharge projects that use recycled water, the Policy requires Regional Water Boards to issue permits within one year from the date of receipt of recommendations from the California Department of Public Health. Furthermore, Regional Water Boards are to give a high priority to review and approval of such projects.

The Recycled Water Policy set a deadline of May 14, 2014 for the completion of the Salt and Nutrient Management Plans. Up to two years additional time can be authorized by a Regional Water Board if it finds that stakeholders are making substantial progress. Although the planning process is underway for most of the San Diego Region's major groundwater basins, no completed plans have been submitted to the San Diego Water Board.

The lack of progress preparing Salt and Nutrient Management Plans suggests that the incentives in the Policy are not effective. Recycled water agencies have indicated to staff that funding the plans is a major impediment, and unless an agency has a project that needs a permit, there is no incentive to complete the plans. The San Diego County Water Authority is helping to fill the funding gap by providing matching grants for salt and nutrient management planning to its member agencies.

Staff requested that recycled water agencies provide short status reports either orally at the October 2012 Board meeting, or in writing. The reports are to discuss agency plans for increased recycled water production and use,

progress on Salt and Nutrient Management Plans, and any impediments to completing the plans by the May 2014 deadline. Any written reports submitted will be provided in the supplemental mailing of agenda material.

LEGAL CONCERNS: None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT: Recycled Water Policy

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice of this item was provided in the Meeting Notice and Agenda for the October 10, 2012 meeting of the San Diego Water Board, which is posted on the website.