

December 4, 2007
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Bruce Reznik, 619-758-7743 ext. 102; 619-851-9997 (cell)



City Council Moves Ahead with Water Reuse Plan

Council's 1st Veto Override Authorizes Reuse Demonstration Project

SAN DIEGO, CA – For the first time under the new ‘Strong Mayor’ form of government, the San Diego City Council on Monday voted to override Mayor Jerry Sanders’ veto of a water recycling pilot program for enhancing local water supplies. The program will help reduce San Diego’s reliance on imported drinking water, safeguard San Diego’s water future and decrease sewage discharges to the ocean.

“We applaud the City Council’s courage for initially voting for the recycled wastewater demonstration pilot program and now for overriding the mayor’s veto of using recycled wastewater,” said Coastkeeper Executive Director Bruce Reznik. “We are disappointed in the Mayor’s veto and the lack of leadership and public education on this important issue.”

The Council’s action, which also authorizes a comprehensive public outreach campaign geared towards educating San Diegans about water recycling, is the first step in eventually using up to 16 million gallons per day (MDG) of advanced treated water from the North City reclamation facility to augment the San Vicente Reservoir (a local drinking water source).

San Diego must find a reliable source of water to avert a major water crisis. The City imports nearly 90 percent of its water from outside the region, and our main sources of water supply (the San Joaquin Delta and Colorado River) are decreasing due to climate change and legal decisions that will result in less water flowing to San Diego. Exacerbating this problem, San Diego is in a severe drought that has reduced even the little local water we usually rely on.

Indirect potable reuse (IPR), often called ‘toilet to tap’ by its critics, must meet stringent federal and state drinking water standards, is cost effective when compared with other water supply strategies, and can provide the region with a municipally-owned, drought-proof supply of water.

In 2005, the City prepared a Water Reuse Study that examined various potable and non-potable water reclamation and reuse options for the region. The option that Coastkeeper and other environmental groups have supported, known as NC-3, would provide a mix of potable and non-potable uses, including the 16MGD San Vicente reservoir augmentation project. The study concluded that, “[t]his strategy [NC-3] appears to be the appropriate choice if the driving decision factors are to *maximize recycled water use* and have the *lowest ultimate unit cost*.”

For these reasons, the environmental community has been joined by dozens of industry and taxpayer groups (including the San Diego Chamber of Commerce and San Diego County Taxpayers Association), municipalities, water districts and commissions in supporting IPR.

Water recycling projects similar to what is being proposed in San Diego have been employed for years and sometimes decades in other regions, including Virginia, Texas, Arizona and internationally in places like Singapore. Orange County recently launched a major expansion of its water reuse project after extensive public outreach.

“Orange County proved you can get public support for water recycling projects if you undertake a comprehensive education campaign,” noted Coastkeeper’s Legal Director Gabriel Solmer. “Polling in San Diego suggests the same dynamic – the public can support reuse if well informed about the process.”

Competitive Edge recently released a poll that found that, when initially asked, 44% of respondents supported indirect potable reuse while 50% oppose. But when informed where our water supply currently comes from (the Colorado River, which receives 400MGD of sewage discharges before reaching San Diego) and the types of standards that must be met for IPR projects, 63% of the ‘swing population’ (those who opposed, but did not *strongly oppose*, IPR) were more inclined to support indirect potable reuse. These results were similar to polling done during the 2005 Water Reuse Study, which found that more than 50% of San Diegans would support IPR once informed about the treatment technology and standards that must be met.

“While the Council has taken this bold step, the success of IPR will rest largely with the Mayor,” added Reznik. “The public will support IPR if sufficient education is done, but we need political leadership to make this project a reality. While this leadership has been lacking to date from the Mayor, we are hoping he will embrace this project now that the Council has issued its final approval.”

#

Founded in 1995, San Diego Coastkeeper protects the region’s bays, beaches, watersheds and ocean for the people and wildlife that depend on them. We balance community outreach, education and advocacy to promote stewardship of clean water and a healthy coastal ecosystem.