

News Release

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DEQ Issues Report to Legislature On Water Reuse in Urban Areas

A recently released Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) report on water reuse in urban areas in Oregon makes several recommendations targeted to encourage the beneficial reuse of properly treated wastewater. The report identifies opportunities for and barriers to greater water reuse. Using water that has been previously utilized for a different purpose helps conserve finite water sources.

The report fulfills the requirement of Senate Bill 820, which the Oregon Legislature enacted in 2003. The bill directed DEQ to work with interested parties and other state agencies to provide state leaders with guidance that addresses -- among other factors -- incentives, barriers, scientific concerns, public perceptions and economic factors influencing urban water reuse. The report also provides a summary of existing regulations, a list of existing reuse projects, and recommendations for legislative and regulatory changes that may encourage further reuse in urban areas.

In 2004, DEQ convened a task force that included municipalities, state agencies and consultants with experience in water reuse projects. "Water reuse" is defined as the utilization of water that has already been used once and has been treated to a level that allows it to be used for another purpose while still being protective of the environment and human health. California and Arizona already have programs that encourage water reuse, spurred by dwindling water resources.

The task force noted that one of the largest impediments to increased water reuse is public perception. The public generally views water treated to drinking water standards as being appropriate for all uses. There are, however, uses for water (such as landscape irrigation or industrial cooling water) that are protective of human health and the environment that do not require this high level of treatment. An important component of water reuse is equating appropriately treated water with particular uses, water quality officials contend.

The task force's most debatable issue (also described in the report) is the reuse

(More/over)



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of “graywater.” In Oregon, graywater includes all sources of domestic wastewater other than toilet water. This covers water from such sources as sinks, showers, dishwashers and laundry washers. Task force members acknowledged that there is homeowner demand to reuse graywater. However, additional technical study must take place to more fully understand conditions under which graywater’s reuse could proceed while still being protective of human health and the environment. The report recommends further research on the issue.

The report offers a number of additional key recommendations that may be addressed by the Legislature or Governor in upcoming months. It recommends that:

- Oregon should develop a clear, coherent state policy for promoting water reuse when done in a matter protective of human health and the environment. Appropriate state agencies should adopt and publicly promote such practices. Agencies central to water reuse issues may include DEQ, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) Health Services Division, state Water Resources Department, Building Codes Division, Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, Oregon Department of Agriculture and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- State regulatory agencies should establish internal and external mechanisms to coordinate efforts to encourage water reuse.
- Appropriate state agencies should collaborate to develop guidance that clearly describes how water reuse projects move through Oregon’s regulatory and permitting process.
- The state should compile a manual of Best Management Practices for water reuse projects as a tool for reuse project developers, municipalities and others.
- As agencies develop new policies and review existing regulations, they should also develop water quality treatment standards that more appropriately define end uses, which should be included in the standards.

Water in Oregon “will become an increasingly more expensive commodity as demand for fixed water supply increases with population growth and economic development,” the report states. “Water reuse has the potential to play a significant role as Oregon explores opportunities to extend water supplies to meet future demands.”

For more information, the full report, ***“Implementation of Senate Bill 820: A Report of the Department of Environmental Quality and Urban Water Reuse Task Force,”*** is available on DEQ’s Web site at <http://www.deq.state.or.us/pubs/legislativepubs/2005Reports/SB820ReuseFinalLegislativeReport.pdf>.

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