

Water Works

By Jack Gillum

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Beginning next week, Santa Clara will use recycled water as part of a Bay Area push to prevent future water shortages.

The South Bay Water Recycling (SBWR) program, run by the city of San Jose, is designed to provide the city and other surrounding municipalities with a "sustainable and drought-proof supply of water," according to the project's Web site.

Teamed with the city, Santa Clara has anticipated for years getting online with recycled water for irrigation, according to Chris Young, the team leader for Landscape Maintenance and Waste-Recycling Management.

With a recent connection and final testing to be completed by city workers next week, Santa Clara will join a growing number of local businesses currently involved in the SBWR project. Some heavily-irrigated places, including the Great America theme park and San Jose St. University, are currently using this recycled water for irrigating plants and grass. In an almost patchwork of recycled water delivery, only certain areas, noticeably some grass lawns, will be connected to this water by next week, said Young.

These locations include most areas east of Alviso Street, including the athletic fields. Other areas west of Alviso Street, including the Mission Gardens, will come online when a distribution system is installed due to the nature of water systems partitioned on the street. Areas around the Benson Center and de Saisset Museum will be included later.

The recycled product comes from wastewater, which is decontaminated and screened at a city facility. The water is then returned to campus and used on landscaping with special signs that delineate it is non-potable.

Using reusable water for irrigation is not a new phenomenon. In the past 20 years, California has provided recycled water for agriculture, golf courses and schools, according to SBWR administrators.

Public safety concerns surrounding recycled water are nominal, according to city publications. In fact, the Santa Clara County Medical Association (SCCMA) officially endorses the use of the reusable water project.

"Chronic water shortages are projected to occur in the foreseeable future here, and water recycling will be a significant drought-proof source of water to make up for these shortages," said Dr. Joseph Mason, president of the SCCMA. "Recycled water is safe, practical and very necessary."

The water saved is by no means trivial; San Jose St. uses 100,000 gallons of recycled water per day, while The Villages Golf Course in San Jose consumes one million gallons in that same time frame. In terms of cost, money doesn't grow on trees, that is, unless it comes from the city.

According to Young, San Jose will pick up the tab for this recycled water project. While Young could not comment on connection costs, the university anticipates a 40 percent savings in water expenditures. Besides the financial incentive, some Santa Clara students liked the sound of a fresh idea to address growing water demands.

"I think it's great that the university is doing something to cut down the insane amount of water it uses to keep the grass green," said Nick Hammer, a freshman and Campisi resident. "Recycled water sounds like a fantastic idea."

Both the Sanfilippo and Campisi residence halls, including the Cowell Health building, experienced a brief water cutoff last Friday while final connections and testing were performed. That procedure was necessary, according to Young, because of water pipe locations and laws which dictate that recycled water cannot come into contact with any "domestic" water supplies.

Some students, however, were upset by the temporary disturbance. "I couldn't take a shower when I got up," said Garrick Jones, a sophomore Sanfilippo resident. "It was quite an inconvenience."

The recycled water cannot be turned on until all of the caution signs are erected across campus, which Young anticipates will happen soon. Young said there were some initial concerns regarding the "ill effects" that the water could have on some plants. But after consulting with other organizations that do use the water, including an individual at the San Francisco 49ers, Young says he was more convinced.

"It took a number of years trying to finalize this," said Young. "This [project] is a good culmination of our efforts." ■