

Using Recycled Water in Our Community

BACKGROUND

Rancho California Water District (Rancho Water) is a local, independent “Special District,” organized and operating pursuant to the California Water Code. Rancho Water’s seven-member governing body, the Board of Directors, are directly elected by the voters for a fixed term of four years and are responsible for setting policy and decision-making. The District’s responsible fiscal management and planning provide the financial means to ensure reliable water and wastewater system operations. The mission of Rancho Water is to deliver reliable, high-quality water, wastewater and reclamation services to its customers and communities in a prudent and sustainable manner.

WHAT IS RECYCLED WATER?

Recycled water starts out as wastewater (water that has been used indoors by residents and businesses as well as in some industrial processes) which is then treated so that it is suitable for landscape irrigation, industrial uses and other non-drinking purposes. Recycled water is processed through mechanical and biological treatment, as well as a filtration and disinfection system, before being provided to customers. This treated water meets the most stringent federal water quality regulations.

IS RECYCLED WATER SAFE?

Recycled water produced by Rancho Water is intended for irrigation, but meets regulatory standards for “full body contact” meaning that a person could safely swim in it. To ensure that a consistent high level of safety is maintained, recycled water is continually regulated, monitored and tested using standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and State Department of Health Services. This ensures that the water quality far exceeds its intended use.

HOW IS RECYCLED WATER KEPT SEPARATE FROM DRINKING WATER?

All recycled water pipes must be color-coded purple, the national standard used to identify recycled water, and labeled clearly with words, “Recycled Water – Do Not Drink.” This follows standard practice that requires separate pipes for potable water and recycled water. Guidelines set by the State Department of Health Services and enforced by Rancho Water ensure that clear signage identifies the recycled water facilities.





HOW CAN RECYCLED WATER BE USED?

The California Department of Health Services has approved the use of “disinfected tertiary treated recycled water” for irrigation of:

1. Food crops, including edible root crops where the water comes in contact with the edible portion of the crop;
2. Irrigation of parks, school yards, golf courses, and residential landscaping;
3. Commercial cooling towers and laundries;
4. Soil compaction and concrete mixing;
5. Artificial snow making and recreational ponds with body contact (swimming).

These uses are listed in Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations. In Rancho Water’s service area, recycled water is ONLY used for landscape and golf course irrigation.

SIGNAGE IS REQUIRED TO NOTIFY THE PUBLIC OF RECYCLED WATER USE

One of the requirements for sites using recycled water is the placement of signs around the reuse area to advise the public that recycled water is being used. Statewide, these signs commonly portray a positive message that the irrigator or user is participating in potable water conservation by using recycled water. In addition, pipes, sprinkler heads, meter boxes, and other irrigation equipment must be properly marked and color-coded purple to avoid any potential for cross-connections and to distinguish the equipment from potable water equipment.

BENEFITS OF RECYCLED WATER

Recycling water is similar to recycling aluminum cans or paper, where scarce resources are reused, instead of thrown away. Reusing water helps to reduce the potable water taken from groundwater aquifers and other sources. Every gallon of recycled water that is used is a gallon of fresh potable water saved. In addition, recycled water is locally produced, providing a sustainable source that will be here rain or shine. Recycled water will protect expensive landscaping from the potentially devastating effects of droughts and water shortages. It is good for the environment.

