

**Public Perceptions/Acceptance Working Group
Blue Ribbon Water Panel
Draft White Paper Analysis
September 24, 2010**

Issue #20

The need for a better public understanding of the overall water picture and the role of reclaimed water in the water cycle.

1. Existing Situation or Issue

A 2010 Gallup Arizona Poll “designed to identify a realistic and contemporary picture of Arizona” showed that 29% of Arizona’s citizens support creating water management plans for all regions of the state. That result appears to indicate that 71% of Arizona’s citizens need a better understanding of our critically deficient water supply.

A 2008 Arizona Water Institute survey of Arizona residents indicated they feel it is important for their community to use reclaimed water. However, two-thirds of those surveyed had “concerns” about reclaimed water. It was determined that those concerns could be alleviated by more information about reclaimed water, better wastewater treatment, and stronger oversight of treatment plants.

Thus, it is clear that a well-informed public is critical if Arizona is to move ahead with planning and financing the infrastructure and programs needed to achieve sustainability.

2. Associated Impediments to Increased Reuse

- Absence of a statewide water management plan
- No unified education plan for citizens about Arizona’s increasingly deficient water picture
- Conflicting information from officials, interest groups and the media about Arizona’s overall water picture, future population growth, and how they are related.
- Lack of understanding of the positive impact reclaimed water could make as an addition to Arizona’s water portfolio
- The public may not understand its role in protecting water quality (proper use and disposal of pharmaceuticals, personal care products, cleaning products, paints, etc.)
- Inadequate and incomplete information about pollutants found in sewage effluent and how they can be treated
- Inadequate and incomplete information about appropriate uses for adequately treated reclaimed water
- Lack of information about the need to adequately treat reclaimed water and what it will cost

3. Possible Solutions

- Develop and publicize a statewide water management plan, involving all stakeholders, including the public. (Such a plan could result from the work of the newly formed Water Resources Development Commission created by HB 2661.)
- Develop and disseminate a unified message about the importance of reclaimed water as part of Arizona's water portfolio.
- Educate the public about appropriate uses for reclaimed water.
- Educate the public about its role in protecting water quality (proper use and disposal of pharmaceuticals, personal care products, cleaning products, paints, etc.)
- Make available to local jurisdictions resources to help estimate costs of infrastructure and sources of funding for updating water treatment facilities and processes

4. Recommendations

- Initiate a process to develop a statewide water management plan, with input from all stakeholders, **including the public.** (state, county, local)
- Circulate drafts of the plan for public comment. This process educates the public about the issue and can lead to public acceptance and approval of the final plan.
- Report progress on the plan regularly, using state and local jurisdiction Web sites and the media. Encourage stakeholder groups to keep their members informed. (state, county, local)
- Disseminate final plan and promote it widely. (state, county, local)

Partner with environmental and other interest groups in the educational process

Establish speakers bureau and notify all service groups in the state about the availability of speakers

Hold press conferences at all levels of government to publicize plan

Establish a special public Web site to post plan and progress as it is implemented

- Develop a unified message about the importance and appropriate uses of reclaimed water as part of our water portfolio, with input from jurisdictions and stakeholder groups (state, county, local)
- Disseminate message continuously and widely. (state, county, local)

Partner with environmental, business and other interest groups

Partner with Project WET, state universities, and high schools to make using reclaimed water a part of Arizona's culture

Establish speakers bureau and notify all service groups in the state about the availability of speakers

Establish a Web site to post reclaimed water news, ideas, innovations, etc.

Use all media, depending on funding available

Use social media

- Restore funding for the Arizona Water Institute (AWI). (State)

5. Describe how the policy/rule/legislation or guidance could be administered (state, county, local, etc)

The overall strategy for increasing the public’s understanding of the role of reclaimed water should be developed and established at the state level, with input from the county and local jurisdictions. Perhaps a staff person at ADWR could be put in charge of implementing the strategy, with a coordinating committee consisting of representatives from Arizona Water Institute, Cooperative Extension, the counties, the AMAs, and other interested parties.

6. Describe the benefits of the recommendation

Using reclaimed water would become the norm for Arizonans, thus adding a significant new source of water to our water portfolio.

7. Describe possible unintended consequences of recommendation

- Without simultaneous appropriate messages about conservation, the public could perceive reclaimed water as “the answer” to our still limited water supply problems.
- “Yuck” factor could push more people to use bottled water.

8. Describe the associated cost / benefit of implementation, possible funding sources, and estimated cost to the end user using the matrix below for each recommendation (recognizing that some issues may not be able to utilize this approach – e.g., public perception):

Cost to Agency (Hi/Med/Low)	Cost to Utility (Hi/Med/Low)	Cost to End User (Hi/Med/Low)	Potential for Cost Pass-Through	Benefits/Removal of Impediments	Additional Comments

In large part, benefits will accrue in proportion to how much money is spent, especially if a media campaign is used to reach the public. Obtaining "new" water from reclaimed water will be much less expensive than most other new sources. Therefore, the investment in public education and implementation should be a good one.

Funding could come from taxes at all jurisdictional levels, water and sewer rates, impact fees, if the legislature restores them, users of the reclaimed water, grants, etc. The ideal funding plan would distribute the costs fairly, with growth paying its share, and would take advantage of a variety of funding sources.