

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

Issue #5 – The need to create and expand public confidence that reclaimed water is safe for reuse through an understanding of how the water is treated and the types of potential uses for reclaimed water AND the need to build a constituency for increased use and acceptance of reclaimed and recycled waters for beneficial purposes through education, outreach, and other strategies.

Describe the existing situation or issue

High on the list of reasons that reclaimed water is not used more frequently is the public's lack of knowledge about the safety of this water source, whether for potable or non-potable purposes. This lack of knowledge has resulted in the public's negative perception of the use of reclaimed water, creating a political atmosphere in which it is often difficult for communities and water providers to initiate potable or non-potable reuse programs.

Describe associated impediments to increased reuse

The lack of public support for reuse programs and the lack of a statewide strategy supporting reuse manifests itself in many ways ranging from the lack of political priority due to competition with other issues, lack of political support for rate increases to fund reuse programs, and lack of voter support to approve bonds to finance reuse programs.

Describe the possible solutions (e.g. policy/rule/legislation or guidance) that could be applied to remove impediments

1. Develop a statewide strategy to increase the public's knowledge about the treatment and use of reclaimed water
2. Create and expand public confidence that reclaimed water is safe for allowable uses
3. Demonstrate that reclaimed water can be a safe water supply source if the level of treatment is appropriate for the type of use
4. Build a constituency for increased use and acceptance of reclaimed and recycled water for beneficial purposes

Provide the recommendations

1. Through public education and information, develop an understanding of how the water can be treated and used:
 - a. Use focus groups, professional public relations firms, and trusted university and private sector experts to provide information about reclaimed water treatment and use
 - b. Provide and/or increase funding to State universities to develop statewide programs
 - c. Use surveys to assess public perceptions and the impact of information and education campaigns
2. Expand the Cooperative Extension Service programs
3. Document savings that can result from the use of reclaimed water
4. Require public and private water and wastewater agencies to biannually evaluate their ability to implement a reuse program within the next two years and to submit this evaluation to ADWR and ADEQ

Describe possible unintended consequences of the recommendations

The use of reclaimed water would become so popular that demand would exceed supply.

The public would conclude that reclaimed water is going to be used for potable purposes now.

Describe the benefits of the recommendations

Implementation of the above recommendations would, over time, increase public acceptance of reuse. This acceptance would make it easier for elected officials, policy makers, and water/wastewater agencies to implement new programs or increase reuse thereby reducing the pressure on potable water supplies.

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

A statewide reuse information program is a necessary and more cost efficient way of ensuring the consistency of information. In conjunction with the statewide program, local programs may also be needed because of their ability to address specific local concerns.

All of the recommendations will require the AZ Legislature to allocate funds to the agencies charged with implementation.

Describe the associated cost / benefit of implementation, possible funding sources, and estimated cost to the end user

Effective public information programs can be expensive and time consuming. In times of shrinking budgets, there is little incentive to undertake such programs unless there is a

legislative mandate to do so, the benefits- ability to implement a reuse program with public support -, or the savings resulting from a reuse program outweigh the upfront costs of a public information program.

State and local agencies charged with the responsibility of implementing public information programs will require funding that will most likely come from the AZ Legislature or in the case of water/wastewater entities, the rate payers.