



**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO**  
Inter-Departmental Correspondence  
County Manager



**Date:** March 8, 2013

**Board Meeting Date:** May 21, 2013

**Special Notice / Hearing:** None

**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**From:** John L. Maltbie, County Manager

**Subject:** 2012-13 Grand Jury Response- Water Recycling- An Important Component of Wise Water Management

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the Board of Supervisor's response to the 2012-13 Grand Jury report titled: Water Recycling- An Important Component of Wise Water Management.

**BACKGROUND:**

On March 6, 2013, the Grand Jury filed a report titled: Water Recycling- An Important Component of Wise Water Management. The Board of Supervisors is required to submit comments on the findings and recommendations pertaining to the matters under control of the County of San Mateo within ninety days. The County's response to the report is due to Hon. Richard C. Livermore no later than June 4, 2013.

Acceptance of this report contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of a Collaborative Community by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

**DISCUSSION:**

The County operates two small water systems located in remote and rural areas of the County with a combined customer base of approximately 168 accounts. The water systems rely upon surface water and groundwater. Water conservation by customers is partially influenced by the existing water rate structure.

The County operates ten sewer/sanitation districts of varying size that serve predominately unincorporated areas. The County sewer/sanitation districts rely on downstream agencies for the treatment of the sewage generated by the districts' customers. Additionally, the County's sewer/sanitation districts serve predominately

residential areas and are located a significant distance from the wastewater treatment plants.

### **Findings:**

**F1.** There is a growing imbalance in the County and the region between water supply and demand.

**Response:** Disagree in part. The report provides information and statistics, including information from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) regarding future projected demands. The water systems operated by the County do not rely upon water from the SFPUC for their customers. What has been written in the report is acknowledged, but not directly pertinent to the County operated water systems.

**F2.** The County and cities must reduce their residents' dependence on imported water by diversifying their water supply sources.

**Response:** Disagree in part. The County operated water systems do not rely on imported water. Diversification of water supply sources for the County water systems could be considered, but options for importation of water to these remote locations is not feasible.

**F3.** Water recycling alone cannot completely mitigate the growing imbalance between water supply and demand, but used in conjunction with other water management options it can help the County and cities maintain a safe and reliable water source.

**Response:** Disagree in part. Water recycling can be a valuable option for some locations and applications to reduce the reliance on drinking water for non-potable water needs. However, there are limitations on the uses of recycled water, and future demand for potable water will very likely outpace the future demand for recycled water.

**F4.** Properly produced and used, recycled water poses little or no public health risk.

**Response:** Disagree in part. Wastewater treatment plants (WWTP) are designed to treat sewage (biological waste) through a series of treatment stages to clean the water so it may be released to the Bay, Ocean, or other receiving waters. WWTPs that receive strictly sewage are not designed to remove some of the constituents that may occur in sewage based on customers' behavior and habits. As an example, unwanted pharmaceuticals should not be discarded down the toilet or sink as WWTPs are not designed to remove these types of materials. Prescription medicines should be discarded at designated receptacles or thrown in the garbage. In addition to pharmaceuticals, there are other inappropriate materials that may be discarded in the sewer systems, which may not be removed during the WWTP processing. With proper signage, plumbing, and usage the public health risks can be minimized.

**F5.** Educational programs are necessary to highlight the growing importance of recycled water in the County and the region.

**Response:** Agree in part. Although public education to alert consumers of the appropriate uses of recycled water is beneficial, greater benefit will be gained through educational efforts on water conservation. Easily accessible educational materials regarding water conservation is an important message for all consumers. In addition to the availability of information, ensuring the general public practices water conservation in their homes and businesses is an important step toward reducing water consumption. Providing the public with information regarding the water sources they rely on, the limitations of the sources, conservation strategies for inside and outside, and local recycled water projects may influence their behavior.

**F6.** The County and cities would benefit from collaborative arrangements to jointly produce and distribute recycled water where appropriate.

**Response:** Agree in part. Collaborative arrangements for recycled water projects where feasible (based on location), effectiveness (based on type of application), and financially attainable could be beneficial.

### **Recommendations:**

The Grand Jury recommends that the County Board of Supervisors do the following, on or before June 30, 2015:

**R6.** Engage in active dialogue with water purveyors and wastewater treatment providers, as applicable, about the feasibility of developing a program for producing and distributing recycled water.

**Response:** As stated, the County operates two small remote water systems and does not operate a WWTP. Development of a program for producing and distributing recycled water should be led by the cities, WWTP owners and operators, and large water purveyors. A program would likely focus on providing recycled water to areas relatively close to WWTPs that rely on a significant amount of water for landscaping or outside use. In general, the County does not have unincorporated areas that are consistent with these criteria. Should other agencies work to develop a program, the County can be engaged to determine whether their participation is feasible.

**R7.** Conduct any studies that may be required to develop a program for recycling water.

**Response:** Based on the information provided in R6, the County is not the appropriate party to conduct the recommended studies. It is incumbent upon the cities, WWTP owners and operators, and large water providers to perform the recommended studies.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no Net County Cost associated with approving this report.