

Homebuilders mull recycled water legislation

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Legislation in Sacramento would change state building codes to require more use of recycled water.

Proposed legislation by Assemblyman Mike Gatto, D-Los Angeles would require recycled water for irrigation at newly constructed homes and commercial buildings in cities that have recycled water facilities or are planning to construct them.

It would include Clovis, which has a recycled water system for public areas, and Fresno, which is planning recycled water infrastructure.

Gatto's AB 2282 introduced in February, is designed to provide more water for residential and commercial use to offset water shortages. Besides using recycled water for irrigation, it could also be used by residents for washing cars and patios.

Specifically, the bill would require the state to adopt building standards for recycled water for new homes and commercial buildings.

Michael Prandini, president and chief executive officer for Building Industry Association, said the requirement would not be costly as long as the reclaimed water piping was installed prior to putting in streets and other infrastructure. But if it had to be retrofitted after home lots are finished, then it would be very expensive.

He noted that purple pipes are used to identify recycled water.

In the long haul, he said it is a positive development. Limitations on water have not hit homebuilders yet, but could become a problem for the building industry if drought continues.

“This drought is a stark reminder that we need to make the best use of our limited water resources,” Gatto said in a release. “Recycled water is cleaner than most of the water in our in our natural aquifers.”

Gatto said it is wasteful and inefficient to dump this water into the ocean when it could be used for a productive purpose.

In 2009, 669,000 acre feet of treated municipal waster water was used in California, mostly for irrigation purposes and 51 out of 58 counties developed or identified recycled water projects in their water plan updates.

However, not all builders see the feasibility of preparing new homes for potable and recycled water.

Gary Mason, owner of 2M Development Corp. in Clovis, said that although installing purple pipes in each new home would not be terribly expensive, a main delivery system for the development would cost plenty.

“You have to have a main delivery system,” Mason said. “And it could be lengthy.”

He said that because cities have no additional money, the cost would most likely be passed on to the homebuyer.

“Unless it is already set up, we should just stay with the water we have,” Mason insisted.

He pointed out that builders are already burdened with costly new building codes including one that increases the wind loads a home can handle.

And as of July 1, new homes must be pre-set up to accept solar power. “That could add \$5,000 to \$8,000 on to a home as we understand it now,” Mason said.

To ensure that homeowners and businesses will not be economically harmed by the cost of recycled water delivery, Gatto’s bill requires the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Building Standards Commission to consider the cost of various recycled water infrastructure and the estimated water savings from using recycled water. Once standards are adopted then recycled water requirements would kick in.

“This bill is about building more infrastructure,” Gatto said. “Single-family homes use about 60 percent of their water outside. If people could water their lawns and wash their cars with recycled water, there would be 60 percent more clean water available for consumption, crops and bathtubs.”

Prandini said Fresno has a lot of recycled water infrastructure to construct. He said the city has proposed plans to cover part of the cost through a fee placed on new construction and part from water and sewer rate increases.

“Fresno is talking about it,” Prandini said.

He said Clovis already has a recycled water system for public parks and trails and the infrastructure would make it fairly easy to hook into new home developments.

Clovis has a Recycled Water Master Plan that will allow it to meet its projected water needs in the next 25-30 years, while protecting its groundwater resources, reducing historic groundwater overdraft and enhancing groundwater recharge.

In early 2009, the city began operating its own wastewater treatment plant and water recycling distribution system. The Clovis Water Reuse Facility is located on approximately 16 acres of property north of Ashlan Avenue and west of McCall Avenue.

The wastewater treatment plant will ultimately produce 9,400 acre-feet of disinfected tertiary treated recycled water annually. The recycled water system will then use the treated water to irrigate green belts, median islands, parks, trails and paseos, Highway 168 landscaping and agricultural operations throughout the city.

Clovis also plans to make recycled water available for public landscape areas in developments that are proximate to the main transmission lines.

If Gatto’s bill is adopted, infrastructure would have to be extended and purple pipes would carry recycled water to each new home.

Once residential infrastructure was in place, homeowners would have one hose bib for potable water and one for recycled water. The recycled hose bib would be identified by its purple color.

Each home would be planned for two water sources, Prandini said.

Recycled water for Fresno developments would come from the City of Fresno’s wastewater treatment plant at 5607 W. Jensen Ave. in southwest Fresno. The plant is operated by the city’s Wastewater Management Division and offers a range of wastewater treatment and reclamation services.