

# Frequently Asked Questions about Recycled Water

## Q. What is recycled water?

A. The California Water Code defines recycled water as “water which, as a result of treatment of waste, is suitable for a direct beneficial use or a controlled use that would not otherwise occur.” Water from tubs, toilets and sinks, inside homes and offices, travels to the Laguna Treatment Plant, where it is cleaned through a treatment process that is ranked among the top five percent in the world for wastewater treatment technology. The result is recycled water – a high-quality, tertiary-treated water that is safe for the irrigation of landscapes, agricultural crops, vegetable crops that are eaten raw, vineyards, playgrounds, golf courses, parks, cemeteries, freeway embankments, and street medians. It is also frequently used in industrial processes, decorative fountains, fire suppression systems and much more.

Water recycling allows water managers to match water quality to specific reuse applications. This reduces the amount of fresh water required for non drinking uses, ensuring that the best and purest sources of water will be reserved for the highest use - public drinking water.

## Q. Where does recycled water come from?

A. The Santa Rosa Subregional Water Reuse System receives and treats wastewater from more than 225,000 residents and 6,500 businesses in the cities of Cotati, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, the South Park Sanitation District, and portions of unincorporated Sonoma County. After entering the Laguna Treatment Plant, wastewater from homes and businesses undergoes a carefully regulated purification and disinfection process, known as tertiary treatment. Throughout the process, samples are taken and tested in a state-of-the-art laboratory to ensure high-quality water.

## Q. Where is Santa Rosa Subregional Reuse System’s recycled water currently used?

A. Santa Rosa uses approximately 98% of its tertiary-treated water to irrigate approximately 6,400 acres of farmlands, vineyards, and public urban landscaping, such as A Place to Play, Finely Park and the Oakmont Golf Course and for the Geysers Recharge Project, which pumps millions of gallons per day of

tertiary-treated recycled water along 41 miles of pipeline to the Geysers steam fields where it is used to generate electricity.

## Q. Is Recycled Water Safe?

A. Yes, recycled water is safe. To ensure a consistent level of safety, recycled water is continually regulated, monitored and tested by the Laguna Environmental Laboratory, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the Department of Public Health. Consistent inspections and strict regulations are also in place to ensure that the drinking and recycled water systems remain separate.



This watchful and responsible care results in water quality that far exceeds its intended use. In thousands of applications throughout the U.S., there has never been a documented illness from recycled water use. Nature has recycled water for millions of years. By duplicating much of nature’s process, it is now possible for us to purify water to a level that is beyond our drinking water standards.

## Q. How is recycled water made?

A. Santa Rosa treats its wastewater to tertiary recycled water standards (also referred to as advanced water treatment) which is the highest level of treatment defined by the State of California (referred to as Title 22). This level of treatment allows for unrestricted reuse in virtually all recycled water applications. There are four treatment steps that wastewater goes through before it is considered tertiary recycled water: primary treatment, biological treatment (secondary), filtration and disinfection (tertiary). These steps are necessary before Santa Rosa’s recycled water is used for agricultural or landscape irrigation, provided to the Geysers’ Project or released into the Russian River.

**Q. With an expanded reuse program, how else will recycled water be used?**

A. Under the proposed project, recycled water will be used in various parts of our city, bringing this vital resource to select commercial, industrial, institutional and common area residential landscapes. A series of potential irrigation sites are currently under consideration.

**Q. Where else is recycled water used?**

A. Water recycling is long past the experimental stage in this country and throughout the world. It is being used for crop irrigation as well as in urban settings and open spaces in many states including Arizona, Texas, Florida and California. Some California communities have relied on recycled water for more than 20 years for landscape irrigation at schools, parks, median strips, large landscape areas, and golf courses. Recycled water also is used in office parks, for indoor fire protection and toilet flushing in commercial buildings, in decorative fountains, and at car washes. In addition to Santa Rosa's current water recycling programs, recycled water is used in other California communities like Windsor, Rohnert Park, Petaluma, San Jose, Redwood City, Sunnyvale, Orange County, Los Angeles County, Santa Clara County and San Diego County.

**Q. Why is water recycling important?**

A. For every gallon of recycled water used to irrigate public places, such as Finley Park, a gallon of precious drinkable water is saved. Other benefits of using recycled water for irrigation include a drought-proof water supply, reduced need to release recycled water into local waterways, and the development of a new water supply with a locally controlled, reliable source that is environmentally responsible. Water recycling is based on the same concept that drives the recycling of bottles, cans and paper.

**Q. Who develops the health standards for recycled water?**

A. The California Department of Public Health (DPH) establishes and enforces the standards for recycled water. Both the City of Santa Rosa and the customers using the water for irrigation must meet State requirements. In addition, the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards issues water recycling permits based on the established DPH regulations.

**Q. Is recycled water safe to drink?**

A. Recycled water treated to tertiary standards is not approved for drinking. Santa Rosa's Urban Reuse Project will be utilized only for approved recycled water uses, such as landscape irrigation and potential industrial uses.

**Q. Could recycled water get mixed with Santa Rosa's drinking water?**

A. Pursuant to state law, the City will lay a separate set of purple colored pipes to carry the recycled water. There will be no direct interconnections or cross connections between the two water systems. These systems will be regularly monitored to ensure safety.

**Q. How will I know if the water irrigating parks and other outdoor spaces is drinking water or recycled water?**

A. Landscape areas using recycled water will be clearly marked with signage stating the use of recycled water.

**Q. Does recycled water give our landscape sufficient nutrients?**

A. The higher nutrient content of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium in recycled water is beneficial to landscapes. In many cases, turf and other landscape plants will be able to obtain from recycled water all the phosphorous and potassium they require, and a large part of their nitrogen requirement. Sufficient micro-nutrients are also supplied by recycled water.



**RECYCLED  
WATER  
PROGRAM**

For more information, call (707) 543-4200  
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