

## More than a drop - Recycling wastewater makes good sense

October 11 2002

Reuse. Recycle. Reduce.

When it comes to water, the region has been pretty good about reducing, cutting consumption sharply in the last weeks as the drought stretches on.

Now it's also doing the obvious: reusing and recycling water.

The Hampton Roads Sanitation District is sending treated wastewater to the Yorktown refinery, where it's used for cooling, cleaning and fire suppression.

Recycling wastewater isn't new. But this is the first time in the state that government - which runs the wastewater treatment plants - and industry - Giant Industries, which bought the former BP/Amoco refinery - have teamed up on a recycling project. And it could grow: York County would like to see other industrial users tap into its new recycled water pipeline.

It just makes sense. Reclaimed water is treated and safe for industrial and agricultural use, but not for drinking. Reusing wastewater cuts down on the amount of water drawn from rivers and reservoirs and wells. It reduces the amount of pollution wastewater dumps into waterways - in this case the York River - even after being treated.

Recycling water for the refinery can save up to 500,000 gallons of drinkable water per day. The 27 million gallons sent to the refinery in the last three months won't solve the water crisis, but it's 27 million gallons that didn't come out of the reservoirs.

Let this be just the beginning. As the region strives to develop the water resources that will sustain growth, it has to look at reducing demand as well as ensuring supply. That means more projects that use recycled water for industrial uses and watering landscaping, farms and golf courses. It's mandatory in parts of California and Florida and gaining popularity in other states, including North Carolina.

Virginia would like to do more. In 2000 the General Assembly passed a bill to regulate and promote recycling. HRSD has been working with Virginia Tech scientists on the use of reclaimed water in landscaping. Power plants use huge amounts of water for cooling, and the new plant in James City County will depend on reclaimed water, drawing as much as 5 million gallons a day from HRSD's Williamsburg treatment plant.

Maybe the drought will help move this smart alternative forward. Policies that will create incentives for recycling include pricing plans that make reclaimed water cheaper and exemptions from use restrictions. State financial support - like the low-interest loan for construction of the York County pipeline - is essential to develop the infrastructure.

Recycle. Reuse. It's more than a drop in the bucket.

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