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Reclaimed Water Use

Washington's 1992 Reclaimed Water Act provided a new program for treatment and management of wastewater as a new water supply to replace drinking water for non-drinking (non-potable) purposes. Reclaimed water use is a fundamental element of our state's strategy to provide sustainable water supplies that will meet our future needs. The environmental and economic consequences of using water once and throwing it away make reclaimed water use an increasingly attractive alternative.

Reclaimed water is derived from domestic wastewater and small amounts of industrial process water or stormwater. The process of reclaiming water, sometimes called water recycling or water reuse, involves a highly engineered, multi-step treatment process that speeds up nature's restoration of water quality. The process provides a high level of disinfection and reliability to assure that only water meeting stringent requirements leaves the treatment facility.

Uses of reclaimed water include crop and landscape irrigation, toilet flushing, dust control, construction water, industrial cooling, created wetlands, ground water recharge, and stream-flow augmentation.

Reclaimed water is considered a new water supply. The owner of the reclaimed water facility receives an exclusive right to the use, distribution of the water, and exemption from the appropriate water right permitting requirements. However, the owner may not be able to divert reclaimed water from an existing effluent discharge location if this would impair existing downstream water rights.

State law requires that reclaimed water use not impair existing downstream water rights without compensation or mitigation.

For more information please visit the Washington State Department of Ecology Web site, <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/reclaim/index.html>, provides information on the state standards, engineering design criteria, guidance documents of aid planning processes, and suggested readings.