

The Reactor

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Oddstad Missed His Chance

What an opportunity Andy Oddstad missed! With a bit of forethought, and some planning, he might have been able to put together a real innovation, here on the edge of the ocean.

We here in Pacifica use Hetch Hetchy water from Yosemite National Park. It is delicious. That precious high-quality Sierra snow water is one of the great assets of Pacifica's quality of life. Every time I flush a toilet I cringe at that beautiful Sierra snow melt being used to dilute waste for the sewer system. Every time I see a sidewalk being washed down I shudder.

If Oddstad and his successors had, when they were building the infrastructure of Linda Mar and Park Pacifica, simply installed a dual water system, the first with fresh water, the second with salt, we would not be facing water rationing today.

It would have seemed silly and expensive to set up such a system at the beginning. There would probably have been side effects such as corrosion if we had simply substituted salt water for fresh water without careful planning and thought. To start with, are there any coastal cities, perhaps in desert areas like the west coast of South America, where this idea has already been tried? It may not be necessary to re-invent the wheel. The idea may already be working somewhere.

If the average Pacifica household uses 30 gallons a day to flush toilets, probably a conservative estimate, we might save as much as 400,000 gallons a day of our precious fresh water to drink, water our plants, and use in other ways that salt water is not suitable for.

We use millions of gallons of our fresh and wholesome water to flush wastes. Then we spend large amounts of money putting that same water through a cleaning process to prepare it to dump back into the ocean. There is a lack of logic, or at least of imagination, somewhere in that statement. Let's find a way to safely and cheaply deal with the waste stream without polluting our fresh water supply. The recent drought only emphasizes the problem. South of us a lack of sewer permits is preventing people from using their own property to build and enjoy new homes.

If the salt-water alternative turns out to be impractical, there is still a fine source of non-potable water available, the used water that we clean at great expense. It's not suitable for drinking, but why not recycle it through the system not once but many times?

Obviously it's too late to do this from scratch in our city, but let's get started. Require that all new homes in the city use either salt water or recycled (tertiary) water for toilet flushing. Let's start today to prepare for the droughts to come. And come they will. Water conservation needs more than a brick in the toilet. The salt or recyclable fresh water is here. It's cheap. It's available. We already own it. Let's start to make use of it.

68-9-1-8