

Growing trend to turn wastewater into drinking water

By Chloe Stepney, Christian Science Monitor

This summer, Texas' drought of the century is an uncomfortable reminder that often there just isn't enough water to go around. But the 40 consecutive days of triple-digit temperatures and minuscule rainfall may also be boosting the case for a new freshwater source being developed in Big Spring, Texas, and surrounding cities.

With a waste-water-to-drinking-water treatment plant now under construction, Big Spring will soon join the growing list of cities that use recycled sewage water for drinking water – a practice that the squeamish call “toilet to tap.”

The trend is expanding as climbing temperatures and dry weather across the West force environmentalists, politicians, and citizens to find newer, better solutions to freshwater resources.

“It's really a natural and cost-effective [solution] when you don't have another resource available,” says David Sedlak, professor of civil and environmental engineering and codirector of the Berkeley Water Center at the University of California, Berkeley. “We have to recognize that as the population of the country continues to move out into the West and as climate change continually reduces the water supply, these issues are going to become more and more important.”

The \$13 million Big Spring Water Reclamation Plant, due to open early next year, will pump 2 million gallons of water each day to Big Spring and three nearby cities – Stanton, Midland, and Odessa – using the waste water produced by area

residents.

“The neat thing about it is that we’ll be able to use 100 percent of the water, 100 percent of the time,” says John Grant, general manager of Colorado River Municipal Water District, which serves Big Spring.

Mr. Grant, who began looking into alternative water supplies nearly 12 years ago, says public feedback runs the gamut from “There’s no way I’m going to drink this” to “Why haven’t y’all done this sooner?”

Water reuse plants are not new, and municipalities in states from California to Florida have them.

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