

# Communities turning wastewater into drinking water

By Wendy Koch, USA Today

Drinking wastewater? The idea may sound distasteful, but new federally funded research says more Americans are doing so – whether they know it or not – and this reuse will be increasingly necessary as the U.S. population expands.

Treated wastewater poses no greater health risks than existing water supplies and, in some cases, may be even safer to drink, according to a report released Tuesday by the National Research Council, a science advisory group chartered by Congress. “We believe water reuse is a viable option” to deal with growing water scarcity, especially in coastal areas, says Jörg Drewes, an engineering professor at the Colorado School of Mines who contributed to the report.

“This can be done reliably without putting the public at risk,” he says, citing technological advances. He says it’s a waste not to reuse the nation’s wastewater, because almost all of it is treated before discharge. This water includes storm runoff as well as used water from homes, businesses and factories.

Of the 32 billion gallons of wastewater discharged every day in the USA, the report says 12 billion – equal to 6 percent of total U.S. water use – is sent to an ocean or estuary and is thus a lost resource.

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