FWEA Utility Council

Protecting Florida's Clean Water Environment

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The Unintended Utility Management & Environmental Consequences of Prescriptive Reclaimed Water Irrigation Restrictions

What is Reclaimed Water? Reclaimed water is a recycled product. Wastewater treatment utilities collect & treat the public's sewage & disinfect it to a level where it can safely be used to water lawns, golf courses, parks, & other areas. Florida utilities have made Florida a national leader in the beneficial reuse of reclaimed water.

Reclaimed Water is not like other Water Sources. Unlike withdrawals from rivers or the aquifer, reclaimed water supplies are not controlled by the entity withdrawing the water. Rather, the wastewater treatment utilities must constantly collect, treat, & either dispose or reuse effluent. The design & management of such systems requires complex engineering.

Water Management District Efforts to Restrict Irrigation with Reclaimed Water. Several Water Management Districts have recently undertaken coordinated rulemaking efforts to severely restrict the reuse of reclaimed water for irrigation, despite an apparent absence of statutory authority to regulate reclaimed water in this way. These proposed day-of-the-week & hours-of-the-day restrictions are designed to ensure that reclaimed water is used effectively & efficiently; however, the proposals would create significant unintended adverse consequences for reclaimed water providers & the environment.

Adverse Consequences of Uniform, Prescriptive Reclaimed Water Irrigation Restrictions. The FWEA Utility Council supports the efficient & effective reuse of reclaimed water, but opposes polices that unduly interfere with the management of wastewater treatment systems & may cause environmental detriments in the name of water conservation. Uniform limitations on the reuse of reclaimed water would…

- Impede the development of systems providing reclaimed water for irrigation purposes
- Interfere with existing agreements between local governments & end users
- Interfere with the ability of high volume reclaimed water users, such as universities, to manage their own systems, which were designed in the expectation of self-management
- Require significant investment to develop & retrofit infrastructure, particularly pumps, pipes, & effluent storage, to address increased peak demands for reclaimed water
- Create the potential for increased wastewater disposal, as utilities must daily treat & dispose of effluent or provide reclaimed water for approved uses
- Further complicate wastewater treatment management, which must take into account wet weather events, the nature of reclaimed water customers, & the capabilities of existing infrastructure
- Run counter to recent legislative mandates, such as 2008's Ocean Outfalls Legislation, which requires utilities to expand the reuse of reclaimed water
- Lessen the economic advantage of using reclaimed water, since irrigation with reclaimed water will be no different than irrigation with any other water source
- Inhibit reclaimed water expansion to the extent that usage rates for reclaimed water help a local government fund reclaimed water expansion

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