

Direct Potable Reuse Campaign Aims To Build Public Support

By [Sara Jerome](#)



Direct potable reuse now has a public relations team.

A handful of academics and communications firms in California are working to build public support for technology that they say makes wastewater so clean it can be blended with conventional drinking water, [according to](#) the *North Bay Business Journal*.

The *Journal* homed in on the work of the public affairs agency Data Instincts. Its previous work includes "outreach on [the Geysers wastewater recharge project](#) and recycled-water programs for Santa Rosa and Windsor," the report said.

In the direct potable reuse project, the goal is to make the public more comfortable with water treated by this technology. "It's cleaner than what most of us currently drink," said Mark Millan, principal of Data Instincts, in the *Journal* piece.

What is Data Instincts up against?

"What Data Instinct and the rest of the team will be battling is the 'toilet to tap' epithet that came into common parlance in recent years amid legislation and project proposals in California and other drought-prone states and countries to transform wastewater into a water-saver," the piece said.

A communications plan is expected to be developed by August, the report said. The firm is working with funding from the Virginia-based WaterReuse Research Foundation.

As the *New York Times* frames the issue, there is a certain "yuck factor" when it comes to direct potable reuse.

"Carol Nemeroff, a psychologist at the University of Southern Maine, said the notion of treated sewage 'hooks into the intuitive concept of contagion' and contamination," the report said.

It continued: "To overcome this, she said, a city must 'unhook the current water from its history.' That proved to be the case in 1998 in San Diego when the water department's initiative was derided as 'toilet to tap' during a bruising City Council campaign. Council members refused to allow further discussion of it."

"It isn't toilet to tap. It's toilet to treatment to treatment to treatment to tap," said Belinda Smith, a volunteer at Surfrider, an environmental group.

A number of cities are considering direct potable reuse. Corpus Christi, TX is one of them, NBC 6 News [reported this week](#).

"Right now, there's even a study being sponsored by the Water Development Board to look at direct potable reuse. A lot of cities around the state are sponsoring that study, so we're not the only ones interested in the prospect of that possibility," Brent Clayton Water Project Manager in the city's Office of Environmental and Strategic Initiatives.

How does Direct Potable reuse stack up against Indirect? Check out Water Online's [comparison of the two](#).

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