

Reclaimed Water in Washington State



Reclaimed Water Plant

Environmental and economic benefits make reclaiming water increasingly attractive.

Reclaimed water is beginning to take hold as more communities throughout Washington realize the value of this alternative source of reliable and safe water.

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Special accommodations

To request ADA accommodation for disabilities, or printed materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 360-407-6600 or visit <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/accessibility.html>.

Persons with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. Persons with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.

All water is recycled or reclaimed through the water cycle you learned about in elementary school. The water that was on the planet with the dinosaurs is the same water we all rely on now. Water is used and recycled back through the environment to be used again and again.

Reclaiming or recycling water

Reclaimed water is high-quality water produced by treating municipal or domestic wastewater to very high standards, so that it is safe and suitable for the intended use. Sometimes called “water recycling” or “water reuse”, the process of reclaiming water uses highly advanced engineering technology to speed up the natural water cycle so that what was once a waste can be a highly valuable resource that can help ensure Washington has ample water supply to support our growing population for generations to come.

Washington's economy and quality of life are intimately tied to our water. We rely heavily on rain and snowmelt to replenish our aquifers and supply our lakes, streams, and rivers with water for both people and fish.

Adapting to our changing climate

As our regional climate changes, warmer springs and hotter summers will decrease the snow stored in the mountains. With reduced snow to melt, less water will be available during critical summer months for both instream needs and human water demands. Reclaiming water allows our rapidly growing communities to adapt and prepare for impacts from both increased population demands and climate change.

Reclaimed water benefits everyone

Washingtonians use reclaimed water for a wide variety of uses where you don't need drinking—or potable—water. Some of these include irrigation and landscaping, as well as commercial and industrial uses like toilet flushing. Reclaimed water is used for dust control and construction activities. It is even used for restoring natural and constructed wetlands. Importantly, reclaimed water is used for recharging groundwater supplies and to increase water flows in rivers and streams.



Class A and B reclaimed water must flow through purple colored pipes to distinguish it from drinking or potable water.



Right water for the right use

Using reclaimed water when the highest quality water isn't needed preserves drinking water resources for now and the future.



Reclaimed water is a drought-resistant supply of water that can allow Washington farmers to continue producing high quality agricultural products.

Safety first

Public health and safety is the number one priority in the development, distribution, and use of reclaimed water. The treatment process for reclaiming water removes and inactivates harmful bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens.

Reclaimed water treatment and delivery follow the federal Safe Drinking Water Act overall principle of "multiple protective barriers". In addition to high levels of treatment, each treatment process has checks in place to ensure that each step happens. This means the entire process must be protected, treated, and monitored, as well as operated and maintained by certified operators.

The treatment processes required for reclaimed water is built off long-used drinking water systems and trusted technology. Safeguards in reclaimed water facilities ensure reclaimed water is fully treated before being sent to users. The system will automatically divert any inadequately treated water. This means the general public cannot come into contact with reclaimed water unless it has been cleaned to a level determined safe to do so.

This means reclaimed water used for irrigation in parks and other public areas are safe for you and your kids to play in.

Pharmaceuticals and other chemicals of concern

Trace amounts of pharmaceuticals and other chemicals of concern have been detected in Washington's surface water, groundwater, wastewater, reclaimed water, and sediments.

According to recent testing, the reclaiming process does reduce or remove a number of these chemicals. However, there are no standards that determine "safe" levels of exposure for these trace chemicals at this time.

As the ability to detect these chemicals in water has improved, it is now possible to detect trace amounts of them in wastewater and reclaimed water. Studies to date show that exposure to pharmaceuticals in reclaimed water is extremely low. For example, a person would have to work in fields irrigated with reclaimed water for 28,000 years before being exposed to the equivalent of one tablet of ibuprofen.