

Water is too precious to waste

Water is essential for human life, nature and the economy. It is renewable, but also finite and cannot be made or replaced with other resources. Yet, we use around 200 litres of this precious resource each day!

WHY EU NEEDS TO TAP INTO THE POTENTIAL OF WATER REUSE

Farmers need vast quantities for growing crops and feeding livestock. Businesses also require significant amounts of water to produce everyday items, from the energy we use to the clothes we wear.

BETTER WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The growing needs of populations and climate change will make the availability of water in sufficient quality and quantity even more of a challenge in Europe in the future.

Analysis show that water shortages and droughts have dramatically increased both in number and intensity across the EU. And according to forecasts, they are likely to be even more severe and more frequent in the future. **By 2030, water scarcity will probably affect half of Europe's river basins.**

It is crucial, therefore, that water resources are managed in a more sustainable way, by using our water more efficiently and by looking for alternative water supply measures.

The treatment and reuse of waste water is an effective means to address water shortages, extending the life cycle of water and preserving

resources. The sustainable use of water resources, as well as the safe and efficient reuse of water, is a key priority of the European Commission's **Circular Economy Action Plan.**¹

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE

The reuse of treated waste water can provide significant environmental, social and economic benefits, while requiring low investment costs and energy inputs. The benefits of water reuse are recognised internationally as well as by European and national authorities. This practice is successfully used in many European countries such as Cyprus, France, Malta, Portugal and Spain and in other parts of the world such as the United States, Australia, Israel and Singapore.

Yet reuse could be applied much more widely, especially in Europe. For example, countries such as Greece and Italy only reuse between 5 and 12% of their waste water. The potential for water reuse technology is estimated to be six times its current volume in the EU.

THE NEED FOR EUROPEAN MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

At present, the plethora of different requirements and standards across EU Member States is a critical barrier to these technologies and prevents wider uptake. That is why the European Commission is developing a set of minimum requirements for treated urban waste water reuse in agricultural irrigation to guarantee a high level of health and environmental protection.

To support this policy development, the Commission has developed an impact assessment of the possible options, and organised numerous consultations with the public, stakeholders, experts and Member States.

These have shown general agreement in support of the water reuse initiative, in particular concerning the development of EU-level common minimum requirements for reuse. Published in April 2016, the Inception Impact Assessment on 'Minimum requirements for reused water in the EU (new EU legislation)' sets out in greater detail the background, the policy objectives and options as well as their likely impacts.²

We all stand to benefit from being open and aware of the enormous possibilities created by technology for safe water reuse. It's not only a smart choice for the Circular Economy, it's also the right choice for the future of our planet.

A RELIABLE AND FLEXIBLE WATER SUPPLY

As well as offering a reliable and effective alternative water supply, reuse technologies also provide great potential for innovation, growth and jobs. The EU's Joint Research Centre estimates that a 1% increase in the rate of growth of the water industry could lead to the creation of up to 20,000 jobs.

Among the benefits of water reuse is that it provides a reliable and flexible water supply which is not affected by seasonal drought and weather variability. The technology is also able to cover water demand peaks. Communities and farmers can therefore rely on dependable continuity of supply, reducing the risk of crop failure, income losses and higher costs which are passed onto the public.

Sources

1. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index_en.htm
2. <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/reuse.htm>



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