



Overcoming Global Barriers to Reuse as Part of an Integrated Water Portfolio

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Introduction

- Climate change, dwindling resources and population growth, among other pressing challenges, create a mandate for the water industry to overcome barriers to water reuse in order to secure an adequate and sustainable future water supply.
- During a series of six B&V-hosted roundtables through 2009-10, the views of about 75 water industry leaders, representing 13 countries, sought to delve deeper into this complex issue.
- Four key recommendations emerged for water utilities and other industry leaders to consider.



Key Recommendation #1

Work together to overcome existing public misconceptions through clear, consistent and continuous communications about water reuse and its place within an integrated water portfolio.

“Tell it like it is” to build community trust

- Direct, honest communication with consumers is deemed to be an essential skill for utility leaders.
- One of the most difficult situations for a utility leader to communicate is when circumstances change and a decision needs to be reversed.
- It is important to educate customers early and often to overcome potential misconceptions.

“The most valuable asset a water utility has is the trust of the community”

Focus on the true value of water

- Consumers often believe that because water falls from the sky, having access to it is their human right. They fail to consider factors like the treatment process and conveyance.
- Educating consumers about the true value of water is of paramount importance in changing the perception of reused water.

Be prepared for a crisis

- Crisis situations offer an opportunity to educate consumers about the true value of water and alternatives for tackling water security.
- The strength of the message can be eroded and public acceptance for alternative approaches may change once a crisis situation returns to normal.

“A crisis is a terrible thing to waste.”

Think local

- The local aspect is crucial. Knowing some communities are comfortable using reclaimed water does not mean others would accept the same.
- Public outreach and communication approaches should be tailored to the local situation.
- To convince the public, you need a successfully operating project with a local application.

Lead from the front

- The water industry needs to present a united front to consumers about the environmental benefits of reused water and its place within an integrated water portfolio.
- Utility leaders should emphasise that, in order to meet future demand in areas of scarcity, perceptions of reuse must shift toward being a critical part of an integrated portfolio.

“To be good stewards, we need to adopt the mindset that there is no wastewater, only wasted water.”

Key Recommendation #2

Emphasize the value of recycled water as a sustainable resource that will help meet future demands on the water supply.

Be a myth buster

- Helping the public understand that recycled water is a sustainable resource is key to the future success of reuse.
- Communities may be more open to reuse as an alternative supply for industrial, agricultural and recreational applications.

“It’s important that your grassroots efforts tie water reuse to water security, environmental benefits and sustainability.”

Anticipate changing needs

- Whatever decision about reuse is made today, unpredictable environmental factors mean utilities may need to adapt in the future. Solutions to current problems should be flexible enough to address tomorrow's issues.





Key Recommendation #3

Take a more integrated and open-minded approach to portfolio management when developing water resources for customers.

Play well with others

- Issues arise when separate agencies are responsible for different elements of the water treatment process; the industry needs a cooperative approach to water management if reuse is going to find its place within the portfolio.



Key Recommendation #4

Call for more streamlined regulations and clearer guidelines around standards in order to improve industry knowledge of the impact of water reuse.

Set reasonable targets

- Communities considering reuse need to agree on what is suitable for them at a local level in terms of the levels of compounds and microconstituents in reused water.



Build an economic database

- The costs of producing highly treated reused water are often higher than traditional alternatives so there is a disconnect among price, cost and value.
- An analysis of all viable alternatives would show why reuse should be included in a water portfolio and how it weighs in against all other options.
- The analysis needs to consider the environmental costs of identifying another water source if reuse is deemed not to be an option.

Make sure the price is right

- Recycled water sources are being priced at a discount from potable sources at about 60 percent to 75 percent. These prices are neither cost-based nor linked to the “avoided cost” of developing other sources. They’re a way of promoting a market.

“If reused water is to be taken seriously as a sustainable water source for the future, it needs to be priced realistically.”