

April 20, 2023

Tampa's PURE Process

What is PURE?

Purify Usable Resources for the Environment (PURE) is a proposed wastewater reuse process that is considering options for using highly treated wastewater from Tampa's sewage system for drinking water and/or to replenish the aquifer and Hillsborough River. When first proposed several years ago, many residents nicknamed a similar project "**Toilet to Tap.**"

Currently, some treated wastewater ("reclaimed water") is used for outdoor irrigation, available in limited parts of Tampa. The City's remaining treated wastewater (about 50 million gallons per day) is released to Seddon Channel across from the southern tip of Davis Islands, where it mixes with other water as part of Tampa Bay, an estuary that contains a mixture of fresh and salt water.

PURE proposes further treatment, but the water may still be contaminated and unsafe to drink.

Tampa officials' stated goals are to use this highly treated wastewater to:

1. Use a portion to provide state-regulated "Minimum Flows" below the dam—to ensure the lower river receives sufficient fresh water daily to maintain its estuary function as a nursery area for fish and other marine life.
2. Increase the reliability of the drinking water supply during times of drought.
3. Comply with Florida Senate Bill 64, which requires local governments to reduce or eliminate the discharge of reclaimed water into surface water bodies such as Hillsborough Bay no later than Jan. 1, 2032.

What does PURE mean for your health, safety and pocketbook?

After 2 years of meetings with city officials and Mayor Jane Castor, concerned citizen groups* have not received sufficient answers to our questions on SAFETY, COST and NECESSITY:

Will it be safe?

The City's sewer system collects wastewater from **homes, hospitals, industrial manufacturers, dry cleaners and all other businesses within Tampa.** Although PURE proposes treating the "reclaimed water" to "drinking water standards," it may still contain some contaminants at much higher levels than what Tampa water customers currently receive. (See next page for more about safety concerns.)

How much will it cost?

The city hasn't determined PURE costs. However, it's clear it will be expensive. **Monthly water bills could increase an estimated \$35 to \$79,** based on initial PURE consulting reports.**

Is it really needed?

City officials **have not demonstrated that an additional 50 million gallons per day is truly required** to meet Tampa's future water needs.

Citizen group concerns about PURE health and safety:

The City has not decided what the additional methods of Treatment of the wastewater will be under PURE. In other words, they have yet to tell citizens how the City will treat the reclaimed water to sufficiently remove the Contaminants (forever chemicals, pharmaceuticals, hormones, heavy metals, pathogens, etc.) before: (1) putting it into the reservoir above the dam; or (2) using it for Minimum Flows for the Hillsborough River below the dam, or (3) storing any of it in the aquifer.

There are no Florida or U.S. “drinking water standards” yet established that set safe levels of the contaminants known to be in reclaimed water (e.g., “Forever chemicals” which never break down and accumulate in the human body, such as PFAS and PFOA, pharmaceuticals, hormones, and other organic compounds) for use as drinking water. In other words, under current law, Tampa isn’t required to test for those contaminants or tell you what levels remain in the reclaimed water to meet “Drinking Water Standards.” So, treating the reclaimed water to current “Drinking Water Standards” is not a sufficient safety standard for PURE.

“Reclaimed water” used on lawns in some areas of Tampa comes with these warnings on the City of Tampa’s website:

Reclaimed Water (without additional treatment) May NOT Be Used For:

- • Drinking
- • Filling swimming pools or hot tubs.
- • Connecting to a dwelling for toilet flushing or other household use.
- • Interconnecting with your drinking water pipeline.
- • Water play or recreation involving water contact.

Endnotes:

*** Our broad coalition of citizen groups studying the PURE project includes:**

- • Tampa Homeowners Association of Neighborhoods (THAN)
- • Tampa Bay Sierra Club
- • Friends of the Hillsborough River
- • League of Women Voters of Hillsborough County

**** Our estimates for projected average increases of \$35 to \$79 on monthly water bills are drawn from the PURE city consultant report 30-year life cycle cost estimates ranging from \$2.1 billion to \$4.9 billion (options II, III, and IV) assuming 170,000 water customer accounts. From presentation to City Council on May 20, 2021 by Juturna Consulting**

Cost Estimates and Ranking

Alternative Combination		30-Year Life Cycle Cost	Cost Rank
I	ASR and Reclaimed Distribution Expansion	\$6,385,000,000	4
II	Discharge to River and Reuse sale to others	\$2,126,000,000	1
III	Aquifer Recharge and Recovery to HRR	\$3,335,000,000	2
IV	Direct Potable Reuse	\$4,853,000,000	3