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As Water Reuse Expands, Proponents Battle the ‘Yuck’ Factor.

Treated wastewater could be the answer to communities’ looming concerns over water shortages. Despite skepticism and, often, disgust at the idea, experts say reused water is a glass-half-full solution.

When Janet Cruz lost an April election for a Tampa City Council seat, she became a political casualty of an increasingly high-stakes debate over recycled water.

During her time in the Florida Legislature, Cruz had supported a new law allowing the use of treated wastewater in local water systems. But many Tampa residents were staunchly opposed to a plan by their water utility to do just that, and Cruz was forced to backtrack, with her spokesperson asserting she had never favored the type of complete water reuse known as “toilet to tap.” She lost anyway, and the water plan has been canceled.

Tampa’s showdown may be a harbinger of things to come as climate change and drought cause water shortages in many parts of the country. With few alternatives for expanding supply, cities and states are rapidly adding recycled water to their portfolios and expanding the ways in which it can be used. Researchers say it’s safe—and that it’s essential to move past the 20th century notion that wastewater must stay flushed.

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Route Fifty

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