

MARKET WATCH

IRRIGATION

Water reincarnated

Use of recycled water in landscaping is slowly catching on, researchers say.

By BETH GERACI

When Rain Bird's 2013 Intelligent Use of Water Summit took place in January at Michigan State University, the focus was on water conservation in the golf course and sports turf industries. But that doesn't mean there weren't takeaways for landscape contractors.

A speaker at the event, University of California researcher Ali Harivandi, Ph.D., urged golf course superintendent attendees to consider using reclaimed water—water that's treated and cleaned at sewage treatment plants—instead of potable water for irrigation in the face of a worldwide water shortage.

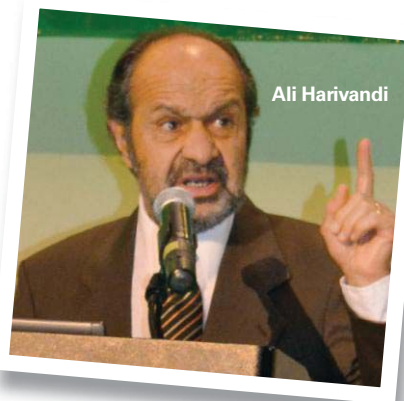
It's a growing trend in the golf course industry, and in a recent phone interview, Harivandi told *LM* that it's slowly catching on in the commercial landscaping business too, especially out West.

All you need is for a pipeline to run from the sewage treatment plant to someplace near the commercial property and you're in business. And in states such as California, Florida, Texas and Colorado, "they're getting more into it," Harivandi said. "As people learn more about it and

the infrastructure is built and as treatment plants remove more salt from the water, within 30 years I wouldn't be surprised to see that all the water in Los Angeles Basin were being reused."

Sewage treatment plants are highly regulated by a government or quasi-government body, Harivandi said, and the water is disinfected heavily by chemicals or different types of gases. Still, reclaimed water use in the commercial landscaping industry is problematic on two levels, he stressed. For one, the infrastructure to irrigate with it in many cases has yet to be built. And not many sewage treatment plants remove saline from the water, because doing so is expensive and requires much energy and fossil fuel use.

Because commercial landscapes generally are home to a diversity of plants, shrubs, flowers and turf that have different levels of saline tolerance, irrigating them with reclaimed water is complicated. On the other hand, if the water is going to a golf course where the acreage is all turfgrass, "it's more straightforward than if it goes to a mixed landscape or botanic garden where plants have different salt tolerances," Harivandi said.



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FLORIDA WATER SURVEY SAYS...

Despite the challenges, a new survey out of Florida shows Floridians are interested in recycled water use, too—residentially.

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences conducted a water survey in December, the results of which were released last month.

The survey, which had nothing to do with the Rain Bird Summit, was done on behalf of the Gainesville-based Center for Public Issues Education (PIE Center). It asked nearly 500 residents for their views on 16 water-related topics.

"We were pleasantly surprised by the water conservation efforts Floridians are willing to make," said Alexa Lamm, an assistant professor at the University of Florida, who headed up the survey.

The survey showed that 65.3 percent of respondents were willing to use recycled wastewater for irrigation—more than administrators expected. But only 20.3 percent of them said they have access to recycled wastewater. Survey results did not indicate what type of recycled wastewater residents do or don't have access to, however.

"We're hopeful that if decision makers know that the public is willing to use [recycled wastewater], they'll be more proactive in trying to make it more readily available," said Lamm of the encouraging results. "We're always optimistic. Any time you can provide research-based information, hopefully that can influence decision making."