



Water Treatment

Waste Water Filtration

Winifred Robinson

So, the people we've brought together here are convinced that recycling water is a good idea. We went to Essex, to see what the people there think.

Man (Vox Pop)

Personally I drink bottled water. That would be my option.

Interviewer

Why's that?

Man

Tastes better.

Woman (Vox Pop)

Now and again it has quite a strong taste to it. But never had any reason to complain about it

Man (Vox Pop)

Well the water round here is terrible anyway. I don't really drink the water from out the taps. I either have fizzy pop or I get some bottled water.

Man (Vox Pop)

I have no complaints over any of it now. Well it's not as nice as some areas but I don't have any complaints, it doesn't have any particular flavour or chloriney taste at all, so I don't think about it very much to be honest!

Man (Vox Pop)

Quality here appears to be quite good. I drink water quite a lot. The art of being a professional drinker is to drink water! Stops you being dehydrated. The water here is pretty good.

Man (Vox Pop)

Well I mean it tastes alright. Exactly what's in it you don't really want to look at how many processes or how many people it goes through before you get it. As long as it is treated right it should be fine. It's just the thought in the back of your mind that someone has already drunk this once. So it is a little bit unnerving!

Winifred Robinson

There's obviously quite a bit of unease there, among people in Essex about the whole idea of drinking recycled water, particularly since it's effluent. Given that we're an island nation, why can't we just draw more of our drinking water from out of the sea?

Martin Lunn

Yes it must seem very tempting, because we see it right next to where we're taking this water. Unfortunately if we did, the water would be several times more expensive than it currently is, but only that, but desalination of water actually has dire environmental consequences.

Winifred Robinson

Pauline what are they?

Pauline Smith

Well there are two main aspects to that. The first is that, the desalination process which essentially is the sort of membrane technology we've talked about earlier, produces a very

concentrated liquor afterwards which has to be disposed of, and that in itself is quite a problem. You're got a lot of very highly concentrated and potentially toxic salts in the discharge. Secondly, it's a very energy intensive process, that's why it costs so much, it's the energy and the power that's being used to push the water through the membranes. and that in itself is an environmental issue for the agency. We're not just about regulating water, we're regulating the entire environment.

Winifred Robinson

So that gives you just a taste of the complexities facing the water companies and the regulators, when it comes to the simple task of supplying us all with drinking water, and now I'd like to turn the question back onto us, whether we the consumers are really doing as much as we could. Claire what do you think.

Claire Jackson

Well when you consider that, something like thirty percent of the water that's been treated to drinking water standards, at considerable expense, to both water companies and to the consumers, is actually used for flushing the toilet. Should we be doing something possibly to look at how we flush toilets.

And in fact the UK is more or less leading the world here in designing toilets that have a lower rate of flush, and more economical in the way that they use water, so that we're not wasting anything like, that much of a precious resource in literally putting it down the drain.

Winifred Robinson

Catherine what do you think?

Catherine Harvey

Certainly I, I agree with Claire that, there is a lot of technology going into, into various ways of saving water, but the experience from other countries, particularly in Australia that I'm familiar with, is that a lot of these things didn't have any impact until there legislation for them. Particularly say in the building industry, when builders were required to install these toilets in, in houses, and I would say without that legislation, we have got, gone less than half the way towards minimising the waste that goes down the drain.

Winifred Robinson

Martin when it comes to asking consumers what they can do though, don't they always point back to the water companies, and the fact that so much water's lost just through inefficiency on your part, broken drains, leaks all that kind of thing?

Martin Lunn

Well there's certainly leakage from the water companies isn't acceptable, but what people have to realise is that, in Essex alone there's eight thousand kilometres of mains carrying the water, so there will always be leakage. What we do in Essex, is we take the leakage down to what's called the economic level of leakage. This is where it's more expensive to find any more leaks, than actually to look for new resources of water.

Winifred Robinson

Pauline, don't environmentalists say that, we need to stop thinking of costs just in terms of, economic costs, and start thinking the costs of the environment. I mean is there any, just leaking away of water that's really environmentally acceptable.

Pauline Smith

I would agree that we need to take into account the environmental effects and, so some extent there are techniques for valuing the environment, but they're very imperfect and, research continues to develop new ideas. So the agency feels that, simply to stop at a simple calculated economic level isn't fairly and fully protecting the environment in all circumstances. We believe that companies should increasingly use the best available technology, even where that sometimes, means paying a somewhat higher price, and perhaps taking them beyond the, the simply calculated economic level. However I

would have to acknowledge even what Martin says that, eventually you can't stop absolutely ever last leak, but you can get, a considerable way further, with improved technology.

Winifred Robinson

Martin from the water companies' point of view, what do the general public need to do?

Martin Lunn

We don't want people not to use water, we don't want to alter people's habits. All we'd do is, we'd ask them to use water wisely, and not waste water, and this way we will get through to the future water needs.

Winifred Robinson

Catherine.

Catherine Harvey

I think that's a very reasonable point, but what I would illustrate is that, the way in which companies ask people to do that isn't actually getting through. There isn't what you would consider to be a general awareness that we need to change our habits, and be mindful of waste.

Companies do put out the literature, but very usually in a leaflet in with a bill which we all know from our own experience mostly goes into the bin. and it is I think primarily the company's responsibility to inform the public of how they can be responsible consumers, but I would also argue that the regulators all three of them, have a role in, in contributing to that as well.

Winifred Robinson

Well, as is so often the case with environmental matters, there is no one simple easy solution. If you want to supply good quality drinking water, then there must be collaboration between the suppliers, the regulators, and the consumers, and you have to be willing to make compromises. So thank you, thank you all.