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## Why You Should Drink Beer Made From ‘Recycled’ Water



By [Carolyn B. Heller](#), February 04, 2020

When Scottsdale became one of a small number of U.S. communities to permit direct human consumption of recycled water in 2019, both the city and area craft brewers saw an opportunity.

The municipal water utility in this Arizona city, Scottsdale Water, approached brewers from the surrounding region to persuade them to make beer from treated wastewater. Ten breweries signed on, joining a tiny group of beer-makers across the US and abroad who are [experimenting with recycled water](#). To overcome the public’s squeamishness at drinking water reclaimed from city sewers, Scottsdale showcased these brews at a local festival, One Water Brewing Showcase, in November.

This recycling process with the unfortunate nickname, “toilet to tap,” is taking on new importance as fresh water in many locations becomes increasingly scarce. Even water-rich communities have begun to see recycling water as a future imperative. As Nicole Sherbert, Public Information Officer at Scottsdale Water, explained, “We recycle everything else. It’s crazy not to recycle water.”

While many cities have been recycling water for agricultural or industrial uses, using this water for human consumption is still relatively new. By partnering with breweries, governments in Scottsdale—and in other cities like Louisville and San Diego—are attempting to put a creative spin on the water recycling process. And craft brewers are seeing a marketing benefit for imaginative environmental solutions.

Sherbert conceived the One Water Brewing Showcase, which was held as part of the city’s [Canal Convergence](#) arts festival, as a way to educate the public about recycled water. “We were looking to use the breweries as kind of a champion for us,” she said.

Some brewers were skeptical about using recycled water, Sherbert acknowledged. “Twelve hours ago, that water went down someone’s sink or toilet. It’s water that has a human history.”

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Scottsdale Water invited local brewers to its processing facility to learn more about the recycling and purification process. Jim Erikson, co-founder of Phoenix-based [Walter Station Brewery](#), was both uncertain and intrigued. "I had no idea of what was going on behind those walls."

But he left convinced. "I strongly believe in the science," he said. "The main benefit is that we're starting with water that we didn't have to do anything to, to get it ready to brew." Like many brewers Walter Station normally runs city water through its own water treatment process. With already purified recycled water, "we could put it to use right away." The brewery used recycled water to produce an American pale ale for the brewing showcase.

Andrew Bauman, Director of Brewery Operations at Arizona's [Uncle Bear's Brewery](#), agreed that the recycled water is "an incredibly pure water to brew with." Besides, he noted, "We're spreading the gospel that all water is recycled water. Beer just makes it fun!"

In 2017, San Diego, home to more than 150 breweries, did a similar trial. The city's Pure Water San Diego program partnered with Stone Brewing at an event designed to demonstrate how this important regional industry could use reclaimed water.

While this event received extensive media coverage, Stone Brewing's co-founder Greg Koch wrote a lengthy post on his company's website, asserting that "many of the press reports have been laughably inaccurate." Articles about "toilet beer" or "beer made from sewer water" were less than helpful to the environmental and public relations causes.

But in the two years since this San Diego event, public perceptions have evolved. "Most of us see recycling efforts in a different light than we used to," said Walter Station's Erikson.



In Louisville, Kentucky, the Next Round Brewing Project, a recent collaboration between water organizations and craft brewers, achieved positive results as well.

Louisville's Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) regularly collects "used" water, treats it, and returns it to local waterways, Sheryl Lauder, Communications Program Manager at the Louisville MSD, explained. For the Next Round project, this recycled water was sent through additional treatment and verification processes. Four local brewers used the treated water to craft beers for an event dubbed "Water for Life."

"You raise a few eyebrows when you say that you're going to take effluent that normally goes into waterways and make beer out of it," said Lauder. "But we had no shortage of people who were willing to try it."

Using recycled water, Sam Gambill, co-owner and brewmaster at Louisville's [Holsopple Brewing](#), created Rerun Rye IPA, which the brewery kept on tap for several weeks after the Water for Life event. The water profile, he said, was "definitely different than what we normally see in the city water, but everything about the water was great for making beer." With most of its minerals removed, the recycled water provided a blank slate that the brewery could easily craft into a new beer.

Valerie Lucas, executive director of Clean Water Professionals of Kentucky & Tennessee, a trade association involved in the Next Round Brewing Project, explained, "We want people to have that 'gee whiz factor' about the science of water and how we need to look at water in the future." It's better than what you're going to get out of your tap."

And it's not only governments and environmental organizations that want to make recycled water cool. Some beer-makers are launching their own creative water projects. In late 2019, San Diego's Ballast Point Brewing partnered with the San Diego International Airport to repurpose water that the airport collected from its air-conditioning units.

As Ballast Point's Director of Research & Development Aaron Justus explained, the brewery ran this water through its own ultra filtration process and used the reclaimed water to create a kolsch-style brew they called SAN Test Pilot.

"We can treat the water exactly the way we want to brew with it," Justus said. "It's better than what you're going to get out of your tap."

Ballast Point customers agreed. SAN Test Pilot sold out in less than a week, and the brewery intends to produce more of the beer this year.

In Scottsdale, the city is planning another event this year to continue informing the public about recycled water, with breweries as an integral element of that strategy. While it's not yet cost effective for Scottsdale to provide reclaimed wastewater for brewing or other uses on a regular basis, Sherbert insisted, "It's worth the effort to start moving the needle of public perception."

Many craft brewers, too, think it's only a matter of time before reclaimed water becomes a standard ingredient in the brewing process.

"I'm glad that the laws regarding water treatment and usage are catching up with the technology," said Uncle Bear's Bauman. "I'd love to make more beer with recycled water."

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*Main photo courtesy of Louisville MSD. Second photo courtesy of Ron Baker, Water for Life in Louisville, Kentucky*

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