



The Water Lobby

Y'all know about our drought....How about something alleviate it?

THE SONG AND DANCE

As many of you know, I'm trying to build my own home to the Living Building Challenge. I am determined to genuinely achieve the water "petal." (If you haven't been introduced to the LBC yet, check it out at <http://living-future.org/lbc>). Call it a closed water loop, onsite re-use, water self-sufficiency, net zero water, or whatever; the idea is take rainwater, bring it up to potability, use it, flush it, keep it, clean it, and do it again. No drawing from reservoirs, aquifers, or other diminishing shared sources.

We're in the midst of designing a system—ask me further if you want details—that should be economically feasible, environmentally sound, safe and healthy, and most importantly, replicable and probably scalable. When I was sizing the cistern and harvesting areas, I calculated that we could have met all our domestic water needs (though not irrigation) with just what fell on our site during 2012!!—you know, the year when we got 3.5" of rain. That possibility is what's got me so worked up; if we can use and re-use and re-use just small amounts of water even terrible droughts would be much less terrifying. Totally worth doing.

Yeah, we've still got to finish designing the system, build it, implement it and see how it works. But far worse than those hurdles are the legislative barriers. I talked to our water utility; they said, "Eh, just don't contaminate our supplies." I talked to our sanitary sewer folks; they were pretty enthused about the idea. I talked to our public health official and he indicated his head would explode if I brought that in for permitting. He has no policy framework to even approach considering it.

So we need a policy change, at the state level, to allow such consideration. Great, I know nothing about that sort of stuff, except that it takes forever to get legislation changes even started.

But lo, there is a gift in the offing, a proposed California Assembly Bill number 1463 regarding onsite recycled water, put forth by Mike Gatto. Here's a one page digest of the proposed bill http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/asm/ab_1451-1500/ab_1463_bill_20150227_introduced.htm

Heck if I know what to look for in regulations, but I've been talking to people who do. My understanding from them is that this bill, as it stands, would actually make the use of greywater a tangle in practice. And it ought to call specifically for blackwater reuse methods too. So it needs to be tweaked. A properly amended AB 1463 would do a world of good, and would be way easier than starting from scratch. It would make the specific solution I'm proposing, and all the others that other people may dream up, options in our toolbox for dealing with water shortages.

The bill has been introduced and has gone off to committees. I'm unclear on how the legislative schedule works but what is clear is that we need to strike while the iron is hot.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO STRIKE THAT IRON

If you live in Los Angeles: You have some very fine municipal employees who will help craft a proposed amendment to the bill, if the city council will take a stand on the issue. That alone, never mind the weight that LA can throw around, is worth contacting city hall for. The issue was broached with the mayor a few days ago, so they're ripe to hear about it. <http://council.lacity.org/About/index.htm> has a little box to find who serves your neighborhood, and goes up to the state levels too.

If you live in California: Contact your state senators and representatives. If you're not sure how, here's a quick way to find them: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/> . Tell them you're a voter and you want to see an amended AB 1463 passed. And spread the word too, please. I suggest, on Twitter, using the hashtag #droughtwayout.

If you live in another state and want to stave off such dire conditions before crummy weather, crumbling infrastructure, rising energy prices, poor management, population influx, etc. bring them about: Lean on the folks you know who are California voters (see above). Then get a hold of your own state legislators, tell them you're a constituent and that you want something similar at home. It's always easier when there is a model to follow elsewhere.

Thank you for your forbearance. Promise I'll get back to design and not bring up the subject again. If you were convinced to take action, consider this an IOU for coffee or a cookie whenever we meet next in person.

Cheers and thanks,

Daphne Dodds Cothren

