

California city looks to sea for water in drought

May 4 2014

With California in a drought, the coastal city of Santa Barbara is thinking about firing up a desalination plant that has been in storage for more than two decades.

The city built the plant in the 1990s during the last drought but turned it on for only three months after [heavy rains](#) eliminated the need for extra water.

Desalination involves removing salt from ocean water or groundwater, but it's not a quick drought-relief option. It takes years of planning and overcoming red tape to launch a project.

Water officials estimate the plant will need \$20 million in technological upgrades. Any restart would require City Council approval, which won't vote until next spring after reviewing engineering plans and the latest drought conditions.

Many environmentalists think desalination should be a last resort.

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