

Survey: Social acceptance of water reuse isn't the biggest challenge

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European surveys have revealed that the perceived "yuck factor" typically predicted as a public reaction to wastewater recycling may not be as bad as thought.

An anticipated negative perception of water recycling, or wastewater reuse projects, is frequently cited as a stumbling block when delivering large-scale water recycling projects.

However, the surveys have revealed that the public is more open to wastewater recycling than the [water sector](#) has historically believed.

Distributed to over 2500 participants in the UK, Spain and the Netherlands, surveys carried out by Cranfield University focused on the use of [recycled water](#) for drinking purposes, and the use of recovered nutrients to grow food.

The intention was to find up-to-date views on the state of acceptance of wastewater recycling (direct potable reuse), especially with more projects coming online.

The results showed that in the Netherlands, 75 percent of respondents supported, or strongly supported the use of recycled water for drinking, compared to 67 percent in the UK, and 73 percent in Spain.

Dr. Heather Smith, senior lecturer in Water Governance at Cranfield University, believes this is due to the perceived closer connection between clean water and wastewater than recovered nutrients and food.

"We looked at the drivers behind people's reactions, and there is a powerful influence from what we call social norms. Opinions on both recycled water and food were strongly affected by their beliefs in their immediate networks."

The surveys were part of the Horizon2020 (H2020) NextGen collaboration that aims to drive the circular economy through a wide range of water-embedded resources, including water, energy and materials.

The four-year H2020 project brings together a partnership of 30 organizations to demonstrate technological, business and governance solutions for water in the [circular economy](#).

Jos Frijns, resilience management & governance team leader at KWR, the co-ordinating organization behind NextGen, adds that acceptance varies depending on a utility's established trust.

"An element in the acceptability of [wastewater](#) recycling relates to trust. Trust in the water quality and personal experience but also trust in the organizations delivering the service."

He added: "In the Netherlands, there's high trust in governmental agencies related to environmental control and quality. That helps in citizens trusting reuse initiatives, and that might be a much more important factor in improving acceptability than just informing and educating."

Frijns said that there has been a recent shift in [water](#) reuse, especially in the public sector.

Provided by Cranfield University

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