

# Carlsbad OKs desalination plant

U.S. News & World Report 6/14/06

## Project faces many hurdles for permits

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CARLSBAD — The City Council unanimously approved an ocean-water desalination plant last night, putting it in the forefront of a controversial technology designed to protect the city from droughts.

Voting 4-0, with Councilman Matt Hall abstaining because he lives near the project, the council said the privately proposed plant would provide a reliable source of water. It would produce 50 million gallons a day.

"The early 1990s was a real eye-opener," Carlsbad Mayor Bud Lewis said, recalling that the San Diego County Water Authority cut supplies by 30 percent at the end of a year-long drought, and was considering 50 percent cuts.

"Those of us who were on the council at the time said, 'Never again,'" said Lewis, who also serves on the boards of the county water authority and the Metropolitan Water District.

City staff members said desalinated seawater would provide 72 percent of Carlsbad's supply under the city's agreement with Poseidon Resources Inc., which proposes to build the plant.

Peter MacLaggan, senior vice president with Poseidon, said after the vote: "Carlsbad is one step closer to a drought-proof supply from the Pacific

Ocean of high-quality water. It's clearly a significant milestone." Several representatives of environmental groups spoke against the plant, including the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation.

Their chief objection was that by wedding the desalination to the Encina Power Station, the project may prolong the life of the electricity-generating plant, which kills thousands of fish and small marine organisms in its cooling process.

"I would rather see an ocean teaming with life than a desalination plant," said Todd Cardiff of the San Diego chapter of the Surfrider Foundation.

Cardiff and others said the region could get the same amount of water through conservation.

About 100 people attended last night's meeting, and nearly two dozen addressed the council. They were about evenly divided on the plan.

Carlsbad residents who spoke mostly favored the project, and many wore buttons that read, "Got Desal?"

Connecticut-based Poseidon still must clear a chain of environmental hurdles.

The company is scheduled to appear today before the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to discuss its discharge permit.

It also will need to get permits from other state and federal agencies, including the state Coastal Commission, which has written to the city objecting to Poseidon's proposal. The ob-

jections include the environmental effects of connecting the desalination plant with a power plant.

Poseidon is proposing to build the plant on about 4 acres at the power station.

The city has agreed to buy 10 million to 25 million gallons of water a day from the desalination plant at a price no higher than it would pay the county water authority.

Poseidon would sell the remaining supply to other water agencies if it couldn't work out a deal with the county agency. It already has agreements to sell water to the Valley Center and Rincon Del Diablo municipal water districts.

The plant would tap the stream of ocean water that the power station uses to cool its generators.

When the power station is operating at full capacity, 586 million gallons a day flow through it, and Poseidon proposes to siphon off 100 million gallons as it leaves the plant, pass the water through filters to remove solids, then pump it through reverse-osmosis membranes that allow nothing larger than a water molecule to pass.

The result would be 50 million gallons of drinking water a day and 50 million gallons of untreated water that would return to the ocean twice as salty as when it came out.

Poseidon's studies said the salt concentration would not harm marine life.