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Tainted water gets OK for irrigation

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An innovative plan to use slightly tainted water from South San Jose's underground supply to irrigate a new golf course and public landscaping won approval of Santa Clara Valley Water District directors Tuesday.

The decision paves the way for widespread use of reclaimed wastewater for landscaping irrigation.

When it goes into operation in June 1993, the project will be the biggest reuse of reclaimed water in the San Jose area.

The \$4 million pipeline will provide landscaping water for Shea Homes, which is developing a golf course-housing complex in Edenvale's Silver Creek Hills.

It eliminates a headache for International Business
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Use of tainted water for irrigation OK'd

■ IBM

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Machines Corp. about what to do with the half-million gallons of water that it pumps daily to remove contaminants from the groundwater supply. Because of the drought, the state has ordered IBM and the district to find a use for the water, which now flows into Coyote Creek.

And it allays the fears of hundreds of South San Jose residents who worried that the district would mix the IBM water with their drinking water.

"It's a first step toward reclamation," said Director Sig Sanchez. And Shea and IBM are paying most of the bill. The water district will contribute \$300,000.

Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, called the decision an "intersection of the two most important water issues of the last decade — water quality and water quantity. This deals with both the drought and the cleanup, and establishes a precedent that gray water is the way to go."

The coalition had organized a campaign to oppose reusing treated IBM wastewater for drinking purposes.

For a decade, IBM has been pumping groundwater from several wells to clean up extensive contamination such as industrial solvents in the South San Jose aquifer. The cleanup is expected to continue at least 10 more years. The water is treated to meet state drinking water standards before it

is dumped into the creek.

Under the agreement, approved 6-0, the district will sell Shea Homes 500 acre-feet of drinking water at \$945 an acre-foot to use until Shea and IBM complete a 2½-mile pipeline to bring the IBM cleanup water to the golf course from wells near Snell Avenue and Branham Lane.

Final approval was held up last month until board members were convinced that Shea and IBM would build the pipeline after the district approved using drinking water in the interim.

Mark Brock, Shea's project director, said the company eventually will pay about \$638 an acre-foot for the IBM water. Though that's roughly the same amount Shea now pays for city of San Jose water, the price will be locked in for at least 10 years under the agreement.

And it will allow Shea to keep its golf course green while others suffer in the drought.

San Jose's drought ordinance prohibits use of drinking water for construction uses. So Shea has been trucking reclaimed wastewater from the San Jose sewage treatment plant to irrigate the newly planted golf course and control dust on the construction site.

Over the next eight years, Shea Homes plans to build 1,550 residential units and the Silver Creek Hills Country Club on 1,500 acres in Edenvale. Construction is under way on some units, and half of the golf course is scheduled to open next year.