Twin (Water) Towers Coming to New Orleans, but Will They Have That Certain New Orleans Je Ne Sais Quoi?

The New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board will be adding a pair of landmarks to Uptown New Orleans. Construction on two 200 foot towers near the Jefferson Parish border is expected to begin in the fall. The towers will help to regulate the pressure in the city’s water system. Drops in pressure have been a problem for the system, but the problem with the planned towers is how drab they look. This is New Orleans, after all. If there are going to be 400 cumulative feet of concrete towering over neighborhoods, they should at least look mildly interesting. Got any ideas for how they should look? Let us know, and we’ll be happy to collect ideas and forward them on to the Sewerage and Water Board.

Updating Water Infrastructure – Never Easy, Always Needed

New Orleans’ water towers are part of a larger, FEMA-funded project that has been tearing up the city’s roads for a couple of years but is only plugging a few holes in the water system’s bucket. Sacramento is currently figuring out just how hard it is to update a city’s entire infrastructure. California’s capital is replacing over 60 miles of pipes and adding tens of thousands of meters in a city that was without water-meters until this century. The residents are getting fed up with the cost and the mess of dug up streets. Sacramentonians(?) would be shocked at the scale of work going on in the name of water deep underground north of New York City. The city is spending $1 billion repairing a section of aqueduct 350 feet underground that carries about half a billion gallons of water a day and leaks 35 million gallons of that water daily, as well. But is all this cost and inconvenience necessary? Well, the American Society of Civil Engineers gives the country’s infrastructure a D+, and Congressional funding for infrastructure has, well, lagged of late. However, some hope that the next Congress could step up infrastructure spending. After all, even Sen. Inhofe (OK-R) believes in the Federal government’s role in infrastructure.

Irrigation Going Where the Water is - East

The good news: farmers in the United States are becoming more efficient in their use of irrigation. A USDA report shows a decrease in water use accompanied an increase in production. The neutral news: overall, irrigation has greatly increased east of the Mississippi River.

The bad news: farmers in the East may not be as practiced
at efficiently using irrigation as their Western counterparts. Though they might be less concerned in states with different legal regimes and fewer restrictions on water use, those restrictions could be following the irrigation, as well. Leaders in Iowa (where they’re also dealing with water quality issues in the way of nitrates in the Des Moines’ water supply) are considering limiting use of the Jordan aquifer that runs under most of the state and has seen declining levels brought on by increased agricultural and residential demand.

Also bad news: there are still water supply issues in California, where the drought continues. The drought is bad enough that the “forgotten art” of dry farming has returned to the state’s wineries. The state as a whole, having passed a $7.5 billion water bond, is gearing up to expand its water storage, but a new study from UC Davis points out that “you can’t store what isn’t there” and if California remains droughty, all the reservoirs they build will just stay empty.

Water in the 21st Century Southwest: El Paso and San Diego Diversify

El Paso, TX sits on a major river, the Rio Grande, but it there’s not enough river to depend on for municipal supply. San Diego, CA has no such river. Both cities are turning to alternate sources to meet growing demands. San Diego has voted to go ahead with recycling wastewater for drinking water. In addition to purifying brackish aquifers, El Paso has also taken to recycling its wastewater. Although some are squeamish about the idea, some in El Paso point out that they have been treating and drinking Albuquerque’s wastewater for centuries. They’re right. At one scale, any water supply downriver from another waste treatment plant is using recycled water. At another scale, all of those water molecules that have been around for billions of years have been recycled countless times from drink to waste and back again.

US Oil and Gas Wells are Even Better at Producing (Filthy) Water

Flowback water from hydrologic fracturing, the water injected to force oil and gas out of shale formations that comes back up, has gotten a lot of attention since the rise of the fracking boom. However, studies by the Argonne National Laboratory show that all oil and gas wells in the country cumulatively produce more water than oil and gas. Most of the water that comes up is water naturally present in the rock deep underground and naturally tainted with hydrocarbons and radioactivity. The vast majority of that water is re-injected to maintain pressure in the well or to dispose of the water deep underground. The fracking flowback water with its “proprietary mixture” gets most of the attention these days because it’s relatively new, but the vast majority of dangerous water associated with oil and gas production is a danger everyone is used to. Maybe more attention needs to be paid to all of these waters – including the ones that end up spread on roads.