

Clean Water Close to Home



The water treatment industry seems to be full of new ideas about how to treat water in innovative ways. NPR reported that UNICEF is promoting a machine developed by Sweden's Royal Institute of Technology and HVR that turns sweat into drinking water by filtering the drippings squeezed from clothes. In answer to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's "Reinvent the Toilet" competition, researchers at Duke have developed a new toilet, complete with a self-contained waste recycling system, that transforms wastewater into drinking water. And earlier this year, Peru's Universidad de Ingeniería & Tecnología introduced a billboard that uses the humidity in the air to produce drinking water for the country's desert region.

One thing that all of these inventions have in common is their aim to provide water to developing regions or countries. While this is certainly an overwhelmingly worthy cause—millions around the world still lack access to clean drinking water, leading to death and disease—it is important to remember that there are people right here in the U.S. who also lack access to safe drinking water sources.

This issue is especially poignant in California in light of reports that the state's Department of Public Health (DPH) failed to distribute \$455 million in federal funds meant for drinking water projects. *The Sacramento Bee* reported that many communities desperately need these funds. A school that has relied on bottled water for a decade and two towns with such high contaminant levels that water is undrinkable were just two examples cited in the article, but the number of communities in need is staggering: The DPH website lists 5,000 "priority projects" which will require an estimated \$12.1 billion to complete.

The situation in California has been recognized and is being addressed. According to the *Bee*, earlier this year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reprimanded DPH's lack of action. DPH submitted a plan of improvements it intends to make so that it can distribute the funds more efficiently, and EPA approved the plan in July.

The quest for clean water has spread to the other 49 states as well, and thankfully there are organizations that have taken notice. One such organization, the Water Well Trust, builds wells for low-income families in need of a safe water source. Although a relatively new charity, the Water Well Trust has already completed projects in several states. One project in Midgeville, Ga., aided three families whose wells had become contaminated, and another in Rogers, Ark., helped six families who had been hauling water in for more than 15 years. In both cases, the cost of extending city water lines to the homes was prohibitive, so the Water Well Trust was able to help finance the building of new wells to provide easier access to safe water.

Stories like these are a reminder that access to clean water is an issue that hits close to home—it is truly a worldwide issue, and that includes both the developing and developed world. But between the many organizations working toward providing safe water and the exciting innovations being developed, the goal of clean water for all may be within reach.

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