

Recycled and non-potable water

The best-practice answer for industrial cooling and how to tell a real scheme from a promise

The key idea: cooling doesn't need drinking water

Cooling towers don't care whether water was ever fit to drink. That makes industrial cooling a natural customer for **recycled water** (treated wastewater) and other non-potable sources, sparing drinking supplies entirely. Where a scheme exists, using it is close to a best practice obligation for a big new water user; where one doesn't, a big new user can be the anchor customer that finally justifies building it.

What the terms mean

Recycled water: wastewater treated to a standard fit for its purpose (irrigation, industry, cooling), delivered through separate "purple pipe" networks. **Non-potable:** the broader category of water not for drinking: recycled, stormwater, some groundwater. **Fit-for-purpose:** the governing principle. Treat water to the standard its use requires, not beyond. Standards and health oversight for all of this are well established; recycled industrial water is routine, not exotic.

The catch: a scheme must actually exist

"We'll use recycled water" means nothing without a named scheme. Recycled supply needs treatment capacity, pipes to the site and a utility agreement: real infrastructure with real costs. The claim to test is specific: **which scheme, whose pipes, what volume, contracted when?** A proponent genuinely committed will have answers (and often co-funding on the table); one using the phrase as decoration will not.

The opportunity for regions

This is one of the clearest ways a digital infrastructure project can leave a region better off: an anchor industrial customer can underwrite recycled-water infrastructure that then serves councils, sports grounds and other industry, drought-proofing a town's non-drinking demand. Communities can ask for exactly that, by name, in benefit discussions.

What good practice looks like

- Recycled/non-potable supply named: scheme, volumes, contract status, or an honest account of why not.
- New recycled infrastructure sized for community use, not just the anchor customer.
- Water quality standards and health oversight stated plainly.
- Potable water used for cooling only as an explained, time-limited exception.

Questions to ask

Which recycled or non-potable scheme will supply this facility and is the agreement signed? If none exists, will the project help fund one, sized for the community too? What share of total demand will still be drinking-quality water and why?

Want to know more? Your water utility publishes recycled-water scheme details; state health departments oversee recycled water standards. This sheet is general information, not legal or planning advice; a specific proposal is confirmed by qualified assessment.