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## Pitch for offshore desal comes to Santa Cruz

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SANTA CRUZ — A pitch to turn ocean water into fresh water on a ship anchored miles off the coast has made its way from Monterey to Santa Cruz.

Engineers from Florida-based Water Standard Co. want to employ a 500-foot-long ship five miles offshore to pump salt out of ocean water and deliver fresh water to shore with a tug barge.

It's a concept, company officials said, that would alleviate the environmental, technological and political concerns often cited with land-based desalination.

Water officials in Santa Cruz, who plan to meet with Water Standard officials next week, are taking note. But they said they're not ready to change course on plans already in place to begin landside desalination in Santa Cruz.

"They have not built one of these yet," Linette Almond of the city Water Department said about boat-based desalination. "It's awfully early in the concept stages."

New pipelines and substantial storage tanks would be required if the city were to sign on for the ship-based desalination, Almond said.

The floating desalination plant would be fueled by cruise ship technology and jet engine power. No seabed pipelines would be used, and company officials said they would adhere to the same emissions standards as land desalination plants.

"This is not new technology," said Andrew Gordon, founder and president of Water Standard. "All the equipment and technology that is proposed is already in use and proven to be cost effective and reliable."

The basic desalination process would be the same as a land plant — reverse osmosis used to separate salt from water through a series of high pressure pumps.

Ship-based desalination, Gordon said, would produce fresh water at least a third cheaper than a land plant. And the floating plant would not require the infrastructure and start-up costs that run in the millions of dollars for land plants, Gordon said.

Instead, water agencies would be required to commit to buy a certain amount of water each year, known as the "take or pay" contract in which the buyer pays the same amount even if the service is not provided.

"All we need is for each agency to tell us how much water they want," Gordon said.

Water Standard officials and engineers from the firm PBS&J of Encinitas made their case in September to the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, which agreed to study the option.

Water Standard is scheduled to meet Tuesday with officials from Santa Cruz Water Department and Soquel Creek Water District, the two agencies that supply the bulk of drinking water across the county.

Land-based desalination plants have long been eyed by water officials from Santa Cruz to Salinas. And measures to recycle wastewater for agricultural purposes are under way in Watsonville. But this is the first time a ship-based desalination plant has been proposed for the Central Coast.

A ship-based desalination facility, expected to produce at least 14 million gallons of fresh water a day, would be the first in the world, though land plants are common in the Middle East, Florida and California.

Santa Cruz water customers, who would only be a fraction of those supplied by an offshore plant, use about 16 million gallons a day during summer.

The city is currently moving forward with a \$4 million desalination pilot plant with hopes that a year of tests will lead to a permanent plant used during drought years.

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