

Excerpt from

## Water Demand Management in Saudi Arabia

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Chapter 6 of “Water Management in Islam” (UN University Press/IDRC, 2001)

### *Reuse of wastewater effluents for irrigation*

Millions of cubic metres of wastewater effluents used to be produced and disposed of without reuse. This was not for technical reasons, but because it was not clear if the effluents were pure according to Islamic views, even after removal of impurities by proper treatment. After lengthy and deep investigations and discussions with scientists and specialists, a special *fatwa* [defined below] on the matter was issued by the Council of Leading Islamic Scholars (CLIS) of Saudi Arabia in 1978. The *fatwa* (CLIS 1978) postulated that:

“Impure waste water can be considered as pure water and similar to the original pure water, if its treatment using advanced technical procedures is capable of removing its impurities with regard to taste, colour and smell, as witnessed by honest, specialized and knowledgeable experts. Then it can be used to remove body impurities and for purifying, even for drinking. If there are negative impacts from its direct use on the human health, then it is better to avoid its use, not because it is impure but to avoid harming the human beings.” The CLIS prefers to avoid using it for drinking (as far as possible) to protect health and not to contradict with human habits.

This *fatwa* demonstrates the dynamic nature and wisdom of Islamic law when confronting the changing needs of the Muslim community. It was an important step toward the reuse of wastewater effluents for different purposes depending on its degree of treatment, such as drinking, ablution, removal of impurities, and restricted and unrestricted irrigation. At present, about nine thousand hectares of date palms and forage crops near Riyadh are irrigated using about 146 MCM [million cubic metres] of wastewater effluents. Wastewater is also reused for irrigating landscape plants, trees, and grass in municipal parks in several cities, such as Dhahran, Jeddah, Jubail, Riyadh, and Taif.

*Note:* a ‘fatwa’ is a legal ruling on an issue of religious importance.

#### *Reference:*

CLIS (Council of Leading Islamic Scholars) (1978). Judgement Regarding Purifying Wastewater: Judgement no. 64 on 25 Shawwal, 1398 ah, Thirteenth Meeting of the Council of Leading Islamic Scholars (CLIS) during the Second Half of the Arabic month of Shawwal, 1398 ah (1998). *Taif: Journal of Islamic Research* **17**, 40–41.