

Good afternoon, Chair Valdez, Vice Chair Velasco and members of the committee. My name is Blair Wisdom, and I serve as Energy Manager for Metro Water Recovery. Metro is a publicly funded, mission-driven wastewater entity serving more than 2 million Coloradans. Metro partners with 65 local governments and sanitation districts including the cities of Arvada, Aurora, Brighton, Denver, Lakewood, Thornton and Westminster, and we have treatment facilities in both Denver and Brighton.

Every day, our system receives millions of gallons of wastewater that has been heated through routine human activities—showering, dishwashing, and laundry. That heat does not disappear. It is discarded down the drain, carried through our sewers, and ultimately arrives at our treatment facilities as a consistent and reliable source of thermal energy.

At the same time, temperature is regulated as a pollutant under the Clean Water Act, and Colorado has established in-stream temperature standards to protect aquatic life in the South Platte River, our receiving water.

Historically, compliance with these limits would rely on conventional approaches such as cooling towers. However, these systems come with significant drawbacks—they require large capital investments, consume valuable space at already constrained treatment facilities, increase operational complexity, use additional energy, and result in evaporative water loss. Perhaps most importantly, cooling towers remove heat as waste, rather than use it as a resource.

Wastewater thermal energy offers a fundamentally different approach.

This technology is proven and widely deployed, with more than 500 installations worldwide. It captures heat from wastewater and upgrades it using efficient water-source heat pumps to produce useful hot water. That energy can then be distributed through thermal energy networks to serve buildings for heating and cooling, creating a renewable, local, and resilient energy source.

For Metro, this represents a unique opportunity to align regulatory compliance with community and environmental benefits. Instead of simply removing heat to meet permit limits, we can recover it, reuse it, and put it to work—reducing greenhouse gas emissions, supporting building decarbonization, and helping stabilize long-term energy costs.

We have been actively advancing this work in partnership with local governments, utilities, and private stakeholders to develop projects that both reduce effluent temperatures and deliver meaningful benefits to the region.

Metro asks for your support of Senate Bill 142. This bill will enable the development and future use of this critical technology - providing clear policy direction and recognition of

wastewater thermal energy as a key component of Colorado's clean energy future. This direction will help essential public entities, like Metro, to move from concept to implementation.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and we respectfully urge your support.

Reactive Messages/Q and A

Q. How long will it take to have these types of projects up and running?

A. Timelines will vary depending on the specific project, but these systems cannot be developed in isolation. Successful implementation requires aligned and committed partners—end users willing to purchase thermal energy and an experienced energy provider to own and operate the system.

As a ratepayer-funded utility, Metro must have firm commitments from all key parties before moving forward. For new developments in particular, timelines are closely tied to the pace and certainty of the underlying development, requiring coordination so that thermal infrastructure is deployed alongside building construction.

Q. So would Metro be willing to give the heat away for free?

A. As a ratepayer-funded entity, Metro has a fiduciary responsibility to manage its resources in the best interest of those who fund us. At the same time, our goal is to develop solutions that are cost-effective and mutually beneficial—supporting both regulatory compliance and broader community outcomes like energy affordability and decarbonization. Metro will need to carefully evaluate how thermal energy is priced to balance these objectives.