

# Conagua touts purification plan

## Gov't to build plant to clean D.F. water

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Bloomberg News

The federal government plans to tackle a chronic shortage of clean water by building an \$800 million purification plant for Mexico City's inhabitants.

The facility to treat 23 cubic meters (6,076 gallons) of rain and runoff each second will be announced for bid on March 31 by Conagua, the nation's water authority, director José Luis Luege Tamargo said in an interview Monday.

The world's supply of fresh water has shrunk as aquifers and waterways, including the Colorado River in the United States, are drawn down by farmers, parched cities or water-intensive industries such as mining. The Mexican economy, Latin America's second-largest, has failed to keep pace, and its water supplies per inhabitant have dropped by more than 75 percent since 1950.

"We are investing all we can to manage this resource," Tamargo said in Istanbul where he attended the international World Water Forum. "Saving water is a priority."

The triennial conference, run by the Marseille, France-based World Water Council, brings together officials from environmental groups, governments, academia and water agencies for a week of debate on solutions to water issues.

"Virtually any of the big Spanish construction compa-

nies could do this job," said Rafael Fernández, an analyst at Caja Madrid Bolsa in Madrid. "They all have the expertise," he said, adding France's Veolia Environnement SA to the group. A spokesman for the Paris-based company declined to comment.

The Mexico contract, to be awarded in June, is part of a larger plan that includes \$1.3 billion of pipes to collect rainwater and runoff to be installed by 2012, Tamargo said.

Under terms for the new water plant, the builder will be the operator for 30 years. Domestic companies and those from Spain, France and the United States have expressed interest in the project, Tamargo said, providing no names.

Protecting supplies, especially in countries where shortages are leading to conflict and increased levels of poverty, is being debated by officials from around the world meeting this week in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city. Two-thirds of the world will face water shortages by 2025, according to a forecast by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, of Gland, Switzerland.

"There's a growing awareness that the world is using a lot of water, but we are not even close to really dealing with water scarcity and security," said Sergey Moroz, a water-policy expert at the World Wildlife Fund of Washington, D.C.

Conagua is also planning to

upgrade parts of Mexico's irrigation network with \$2 billion

of spending by 2012 to improve the distribution system for 1.2 million hectares of land. Mexico has 6.46 million hectares of irrigated land, making agriculture the largest consumer of water in the country of 112 million people. Mexico's per capita water availability declined to 4,312 cubic meters in 2007 from 18,035 cubic meters in 1950, with some regions, including parts of the Pacific coast in Baja California, reaching "alarmingly low" levels, Conagua said in a report last year on the state of water resources in Mexico.

The nation is divided into 13 hydrological regions, ranging from arid in the north to humid in the southeast.

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**We are investigating all we can to manage this resource."**

**JOSÉ LUIS LUEGE TAMARGO**

Conagua director



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