



County of San Diego

Department of Environmental Health & Quality

Land and Water Quality Division

Graywater Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is graywater?

Graywater is untreated wastewater that has not been contaminated by any toilet discharge. Graywater includes wastewater from bathtubs, showers, bathroom sinks, clothes washing machines and laundry sinks. It does not include wastewater from kitchen sinks, dishwashers, photo lab sinks or laundry water from soiled diapers.

2. What is a graywater system?

Graywater systems are onsite wastewater systems that use graywater for subsurface landscape irrigation through the use of mulch basins, disposal trenches or subsurface drip irrigation fields.

3. Are there regulations for the use of graywater?

The regulations for the design, construction and use of graywater systems can be found in Chapter 16A of the California Plumbing Code (CPC). A copy of the emergency regulations adopted on August 4, 2009 and the modifications approved for adoption on January 12, 2010 can be found on our website at:

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/lwqd/lu_graywater_systems.html.

4. Who regulates the use of graywater in San Diego County?

The County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health & Quality (DEHQ) has been delegated the authority to regulate graywater systems in the unincorporated area of San Diego County by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB). DEHQ does not regulate graywater systems in the incorporated cities in San Diego County. These cities can implement a program of their own that meets or exceeds the requirements of the CPC with approval from the RWQCB. Questions regarding graywater systems within an incorporated city should be addressed by that city.

5. Can I allow my graywater to discharge to the ground surface?

Due to the potential for high levels of bacteria and viruses in graywater, graywater must be used in a way that eliminates potential human contact or the creation of nuisances. The regulations for graywater systems allows for subsurface irrigation only, although graywater can be discharged to the ground surface in a mulch basin as long as it remains covered with at least two inches of mulch, rock or soil.

6. Can I use graywater for other purposes such as flushing toilets?

The CPC allows graywater to be used for flushing toilets but the graywater must meet the same regulations in place for the use of recycled water with respect to treatment, permitting, inspection and cross connection control.

7. Do I need a permit to install a graywater system?

Construction permits are not required for graywater systems that collect graywater from a clothes washer only and where no modifications to the plumbing system are required or pumps are proposed to be used as part of the graywater system. This type of system must still meet the design and construction standards found in the regulations. All other graywater systems require a construction permit. Plans for graywater systems must be submitted to DEHQ or the authorized permitting agency for review and approval of the graywater design. Once the design is approved, a construction permit must be obtained to install the graywater system and allow for inspection by the permitting agency.

8. Do I need to contact any other agencies for the installation of a graywater system?

You need to contact your local building department to discuss plumbing, venting and electrical requirements as needed for either new construction or the retrofit of an existing structure where a graywater system is proposed. In addition, you need to contact your local water purveyor to discuss the need for the installation of a backflow protection device at the water meter.

9. What kind of plants can I irrigate with graywater?

Graywater can be used to irrigate fruit trees, ornamental trees, shrubs, groundcover and lawns. Graywater should not be used in vegetable gardens where the food is a root crop or touches the ground surface. Be aware that soaps and detergents can contain a variety of chemicals to aid in cleaning that may be harmful to your plants. Please contact a reputable landscape specialist for more information.

10. Where can I find more information on graywater?

Additional information regarding graywater and onsite wastewater systems is available on the DEHQ website at https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/lwqd/lu_graywater_systems.html. You can also call the Land and Water Quality Division at 858-565-5173.