



CITY OF NEWPORT BEACH

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT BUILDING DIVISION

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GRAY WATER SYSTEMS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is Gray Water?

Gray water is untreated wastewater that has not been contaminated by any toilet discharge. Gray water 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 Gray Water System?

Gray water systems are onsite wastewater systems that use gray water 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 Gray Water?

The regulations for the design, construction and use of gray water systems can be found in Chapter 16 of the California Plumbing Code (plumbing code).

4. Who regulates the use of Gray Water in the City of Newport Beach?

The City of Newport Beach, Building Division, regulates gray water systems in the City.

5. What types of Gray Water Systems are there?

There are three types:

- Clothes Washer System – No permit required
- Simple System (less than 250 gallons per day) – Permit required
- Complex System (more than 250 gallons per day) – Permit required

6. What is a clothes washer system?

A clothes washer system is a gray water system that collects waste water from a washing machine and distributes it to your yard for subsurface irrigation of landscape plants. Clothes washer systems do not receive waste water from any other source. There is no requirement for a construction permit for this type of system.

7. Can I allow my Gray Water to discharge to the ground surface?

Due to the potential for high levels of bacteria and viruses in gray water it must be used in a way that eliminates potential human contact or the creation of nuisances. The regulations for gray water systems allows for subsurface irrigation only, although gray water 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.

8. Can I use Gray Water for other purposes such as flushing toilets?

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

9. Do I need a permit to install a Gray Water System?

Permits are not required for gray water systems that collect from a clothes washer only, where no pumps are used and no modifications to the plumbing system are required. The system must still meet the design and construction standards found in the plumbing code regulations. All other gray water systems require a construction permit. Plans for gray water systems must be submitted to Building Division for review and approval of the gray water design. Once the design is approved, a construction permit must be obtained to install the gray water system and allow for inspection by the City.

10. Do I need to contact any other agencies for the installation of a Gray Water System?

Yes, you will need to contact the City Building Division, (949) 644-3200 to discuss plumbing, venting and electrical requirements as needed for either new construction or the retrofit of an existing structure where a gray water system is proposed.

11. What kind of plants can I irrigate with Gray Water?

Gray water can be used to irrigate fruit trees, ornamental trees, shrubs, groundcover and lawns. Gray water 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 your local landscape specialist for more information.