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Requirements For No-permit Graywater Systems (ie Clothes Washer Systems)

As drought conditions persist, many people are looking for ways to conserve water. One popular idea is to use graywater for irrigation. When following the statewide requirements found in the California Plumbing Code, using graywater for irrigation can be safe and affordable.

The simplest graywater system diverts clothes washer water for outdoor irrigation before it enters the house plumbing. When strictly following the California Code of Regulations, Title 24, Part 5, Chapter 16A, clothes washer systems that only recycle wash water do not require a permit for installation or operation.

Remember, this exemption does not allow other work, such as tying into existing wastewater plumbing or installation of pumps or devices requiring electrical connection. These more complex graywater systems require a standard building permit. Also, any graywater systems which do not drain properly, create odors, backup, or cause other health or nuisance problems must be corrected immediately.

Here is a summary of clothes washer system requirements:

The system **must**:

- use the waste water from a clothes washer only
- serve a one- or two-family dwelling only
- have a labeled and readily accessible way to direct graywater back to the sewer/septic
- send the water to irrigate landscape plantings
- meet minimum setbacks for irrigation (2 ft from buildings; 18 in from property lines; 100 ft from water wells, streams and lakes; 10 ft from public water mains)
- keep the water on the same property where produced
- have an operation and maintenance manual
- discharge graywater under a 2" cover of mulch, plastic shield, or stones
- minimize contact with humans and domestic pets

The system **must not**:

- connect to or alter any existing piping in the home
- contain water used to wash diapers or similar soiled clothing
- contain hazardous chemicals (such as from a home photo lab, grease or oil)
- have pooling graywater or runoff
- include a pump (except the washing machine's internal pump)
- be stored (such as in tubs, ponds, etc)
- connect to the potable water supply
- affect other parts of the building, such as the electrical or structural components
- be used for irrigating edible root crops or edible parts of food that touch the soil

For an example of a Clothes Washer System see <http://oasisdesign.net/greywater/laundry>