

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICE



POLICY ON USE OF GRAYWATER

"Graywater" is that portion of sewage exclusive of toilet wastes. Graywater may include sink, shower, and laundry wastes.

The Environmental Health Service recommends that graywater be used only if all other conservation methods have been exhausted and with certain safeguards.

The California Health and Safety Code defines all waste waters, regardless of source, as sewage and specifically prohibits their discharge where a threat to public health or nuisance might be created. And further, according to the Uniform Plumbing Code it is unlawful to dispose of sewage by any other means except by an approved plumbing and drainage system.

Graywater improperly disposed of can create nuisance conditions and may be a source of water borne disease. It must be recognized that the use of graywater is tolerable only under extreme conditions and only as a temporary measure.

If graywater must be used as an extreme conservation measure the following guidelines should apply:

1. Every effort should be made to obtain a significant reduction in water consumption through conservation before use of graywater is considered.
2. The only use of graywater within the household should be direct toilet flushing (bucket method).
3. There should be no alteration of the plumbing system.
4. Graywater should not be used on root crops and low-growing food crops such as carrots, radishes, onions, lettuce, strawberries, etc.
5. Graywater may be safely used for higher growing non-root crops such as beans, corn, tomatoes, etc., as long as there is no contact with the edible portion of the plant.
6. Because graywater may damage some plants it is recommended that advice be obtained from the University of California Agricultural Extension Office or similar expert source.
7. Storage of graywater may result in malodors. Attraction or breeding of insects such as mosquitoes can occur if containers are not tightly covered or screened. Large storage containers may pose a safety hazard to children.