



COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRO TEM
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CITY OF SAN DIEGO – COUNCIL DISTRICT 1
Press Release

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City Council Approves New Graywater Rules
Policies aim to cut red tape and increase awareness

SAN DIEGO –The City Council today unanimously approved critical changes to the city’s graywater policies to encourage San Diegans to install graywater systems, which can help homeowners conserve water and save money.

Graywater systems, widely used in cities such as San Francisco, Santa Barbara and Phoenix, allow untreated wastewater from a home’s washing machine, bathtubs, showers and sinks to be recycled on-site for such uses as outdoor irrigation. In a pilot project, the City of Los Angeles found that graywater reuse has the potential to reduce a household’s water use by as much as 50 percent.

For years, the City of San Diego has had unclear and contradictory rules regarding graywater, which has inhibited the use of these water-saving systems. Council President Pro Tem Sherri Lightner, who has long been a champion of increasing graywater use, first recommended changes to the city’s policies last fall. The new rules, which were vetted by the city’s Water Policy Implementation Task Force, will:

- Expand the “no permit” requirement to systems used for landscape irrigation that discharge less than 250 gallons a day.
- Streamline the permitting process for “simple” and “complex systems” that take discharge water from other elements in a residence such as bathtubs and showers.
- Develop a public outreach and education program, including social media, to promote graywater usage.

“Graywater is a simple and effective way to conserve water, and it needs to be part of the city’s overarching strategy to create a local and sustainable water supply,” Lightner said. “Other cities have been encouraging graywater use for years, and it’s time San Diego streamlines the process so it is easy and inexpensive to install these water-saving systems.”

Councilmember David Alvarez, chair of the Natural Resources and Culture Committee, applauded the new proposals and encouraged all San Diegans to explore the benefits of installing a graywater system.

“The city needs to make it as easy as possible for rate payers to get the most use out of the water they pay for by re-using it for things like landscape irrigation. It is a shame to let perfectly good water literally go down the drain instead of getting a second use from it,” Alvarez said. “Streamlining our permitting process for graywater systems is a common sense step to take in a region like ours where water is such a valuable asset.”

Going forward, Lightner said she wants the city to establish a rebate program for those who install graywater systems as well as explore incentives for developers to include “graywater-ready” plumbing for all new residential construction so that using graywater system could be as easy as turning on a spigot.

Local environmentalists applauded Lightner’s efforts to boost graywater usage. Josh Robinson, director of the San Diego Sustainable Living Institute, recently launched the “Great Graywater Challenge” in hopes of installing a system a day over the next year.

Robinson said the new graywater rules will pay huge dividends both for consumers and for the city.

“The cost of a graywater system can be as low as \$150 and each one has the potential to save 16,000 gallons of water per household,” Robinson said. “For a small amount of money, you can see a viable return on investment.”

To find out more about the “Great Graywater Challenge,” visit <http://sdsustainable.org/>.

Sherri Lightner is the Councilmember for Council District One of the City of San Diego, which includes the communities of Carmel Valley, Del Mar Mesa, La Jolla, Pacific Highlands Ranch, Torrey Hills, Torrey Pines, and University City. She took office December 8, 2008.

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