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Council Committee Approves New Graywater Rules

Policies aim to streamline regulations and increase awareness

SAN DIEGO –The Natural Resources and Culture Committee today unanimously approved critical changes to the city’s graywater policies to encourage San Diegans to install graywater systems, which help conserve water.

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.

Currently, the City of San Diego has unclear and contradictory rules regarding graywater, which has inhibited the use of graywater systems. To increase the use of graywater systems, the Natural Resources and Culture Committee approved recommendations made by the city’s Water Policy Implementation Task Force. The task force is charged with developing an action plan to ensure San Diego has an affordable and sustainable water supply. Its recommendations include:

- 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 a social media, to promote graywater usage.

“I have been advocating for increased graywater use since I was first elected to City Council because it is such a simple and effective way to reduce water usage,” Lightner said. “It’s something other cities have been doing for years and San Diego needs to get on board.”

Councilmember David Alvarez, chair of the Natural Resources and Culture Committee, applauded the Task Force's recommendations and encouraged all San Diegans to explore the benefits of installing a graywater system.

"San Diegans know the value of not wasting a valuable resource like water," Alvarez said. "It is crucial that the city make it as easy as possible for residents to conserve water by providing a process that makes it simple and easy to install and operate a graywater system in your home."

"As a region that imports close to 80 percent of our water supply, San Diego is ripe for graywater practices and solutions," said Councilmember Lorie Zapf. "I am happy we took a proactive approach that will empower individuals and companies to move forward with clean-water systems."

To help get boost awareness and increase graywater usage, local environmentalists also have launched the "Great Graywater Challenge," which aims to install 365 graywater systems, or a system a day. Josh Robinson, the director of the San Diego Sustainable Living Institute, estimates that installing just 365 graywater systems could save as much as 5 million gallons of water annually.

Robinson applauded the leadership of Lightner and the Natural Resources and Culture Committee, saying the focus on streamlining graywater regulations and improving education 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/>.

The graywater recommendations will be heard by the full San Diego City Council later this spring.