



RESIDENTIAL GRAY WATER-CLOTHES WASHER SYSTEM

BUILDING INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS

A plumbing permit is not required for gray water Clothes Washer System, however, all design and code requirements in California Plumbing Code are required to be met. Permits are required for systems that include tanks or pumps.

The following is a listing of the general requirements for gray water Clothes Washer Systems based on the 2022 California Plumbing Code and the Contra Costa County Municipal Code. This brochure is intended to provide general information, contact the Building Inspection Division for additional information.

How a Clothes Washer System Works

Gray water systems directly reuse “waste water” to irrigate outdoor landscaping. A Clothes Washer System diverts gray water from the washing machine to an outdoor landscaped area without cutting into existing plumbing lines/piping. Washing machines have internal pumps which can be used to pump water directly out to the outdoor landscaped area. It is recommended that detergents or bleach that may be harmful to landscaping not be used in the clothes washer.

Clothes Washer System Installation and Operation

A permit is not required for a Clothes Washer System that does not include a potable water connection, a pump (other than the washing machine itself), or affect other building components (i.e. plumbing, electrical, mechanical, etc.). Although a permit is not required, the following installation and operational standards outlined below are required to be met. Proper system design, maintenance and use are the responsibility of the system owner.

Installation Standards:

1. The washing machine discharge hose shall be attached to a diverter valve that allows the user to direct the flow to either the irrigation/disposal field or to the building sewer. The direction control of the gray water shall be clearly labeled and readily accessible to the user. (CPC 1503.1)
2. Gray water piping shall be provided to carry the gray water out to the yard. Gray water shall be directed to and contained within an irrigation, mulch basin, or disposal field. A mulch basin with two inches of cover is the simplest system for distribution and irrigation. Once outside the building, the discharge must drain directly to the disposal field. (CPC 1504.5.3)
3. The point of discharge shall be a minimum of five feet from a property line. (CPC Table 1503.4)
4. Piping at five foot increments shall be permanently labeled: “CAUTION: NONPOTABLE GRAY WATER, DO NOT DRINK”. (CPC 1504.8)
5. Gray water cannot be used on the edible portion of vegetables and can only be used for sub-surface irrigation in order to reduce human contact or ponding. (CPC 1503.2)

Operational Standards (CPC 1503.1):

1. The gray water shall be contained on the site where it is generated.
2. All gray water must be used the same day it was produced and cannot be stored. Ponding or runoffs is prohibited, and shall be considered a nuisance.
3. Gray water systems shall be designated to minimize contact with humans and domestic pets.
4. Water used to wash diapers or similarly soiled or infectious garments shall not be used and shall be diverted to the building sewer.
5. Gray water shall not contain hazardous chemicals derived from activities such as cleaning car parts, washing greasy or oily rags or disposing of waste solution from home photo labs or similar hobbyist or home occupational activities.
6. Exemption from construction permit requirements of this code shall not be deemed to grant authorization for any gray water system to be installed in a manner that violates other provisions of this code or any other laws or ordinances of Contra Costa County.
7. All systems shall have a maintenance manual. The manual is to remain with the building throughout the life of the system and indicate that upon change of ownership or occupancy, the new owner or tenant shall be notified that the structure contains a gray water system.