Frequently Asked Questions

GRAYWATER FOR IRRIGATION

What is graywater?
Graywater is water from showers, bath tubs, washing machines, and bathroom sinks. It is water that contains some soap but is clean enough to water plants. Water from toilets, wash water from diapers, and kitchen sink water is not considered graywater in California.

Why use graywater?
Graywater can help reduce the use of high-quality drinking water for irrigation, decrease flows to our wastewater system, and lower customers' water and wastewater bills. Using graywater also helps us understand where our water comes from and where it goes. Becoming conscious of our water supply encourages healthier product choices and engagement with our landscapes. In concert with indoor water conservation and water-wise landscaping, using graywater can help reduce dependency on imported water and protects the urban watershed.

Is it legal?
Yes! In August 2009, California's graywater regulations changed, allowing for lower-cost graywater systems to be installed legally.

Do I need a permit?
In San Francisco, a permit is not required for a one- or two-unit residential building with a graywater system that uses clothes washer discharge water only for landscape irrigation. Any other graywater system requires a permit from the San Francisco Department of Building Inspection (DBI). For more information on permit requirements, contact DBI at 1660 Mission Street, San Francisco or (415) 558-6088.

How can I use it?
You can pipe graywater from your home directly outside and use it to irrigate ornamental plants or fruit trees in your yard.

Is it safe to use graywater?
Yes, if you follow requirements while constructing your graywater system, such as minimizing contact with graywater and allowing graywater to percolate through topsoil. See the San Francisco Graywater Design Manual for specific guidelines.

How do I get started?
Review the San Francisco Graywater Design Manual for assistance in developing a laundry-to-landscape or other simple graywater systems. Please visit www.sfwater.org/landscape to obtain a copy of the manual when it's finalized spring 2011. California's requirements for residential graywater systems can be found inmailto: Chapter 16A of the California Plumbing Code.