

Got Graywater? Get Rainwater!

By Jim MacDonald, CBO, CFM

On January 17, 2014, Governor Brown declared that “we can’t make it rain, but we can be better prepared for the terrible consequences” of California’s current drought. Since we can’t make it rain, what can we do? Well, for one, we can use the water coming from our clothes washers, which is usually just sent down the drain, to irrigate our flower beds and shrubs. And, when it rains, we can capture and keep Rainwater for irrigation. Together, Graywater and Rainwater may significantly reduce, or even eliminate, the amount of potable water used for residential irrigation.

Repurposing graywater, and capturing Rainwater, is good for the water bill and the environment. With each load of laundry, a homeowner can reduce their demand for water and ease the drought’s effects; a win-win! Interested yet? Here is your chance to learn more about reusing water in a smart and simple way and avoid hazards from the misuse of graywater.

Some may consider just running a garden hose from the clothes washer and out the window to lawns and flower beds. While it may seem harmless to run Graywater directly onto the lawn, doing so presents potential dangers most are not aware of.

Graywater allowed to accumulate on the surface of the ground puts our pets, children, and the public at risk of harmful bacterial contact. Graywater also can contaminate low-to-the-ground vegetables such as carrots and strawberries. It is safe, however, to use Graywater for irrigating citrus and avocado trees, if done correctly.

Additionally, for 2014, state regulations now allow for limited collection and use of rainwater for residential irrigation. Like a Laundry Graywater Disposal System (LGDS), a small rainwater collection system can be installed without a plumbing permit, if some basic commonsense rules are followed. More details on Rainwater capturing will be available during our upcoming summer workshops.

The Ventura County Building and Safety Division has a standard plan for a safe and sanitary laundry LGDS installation. Remember that such a system is allowed only on a property with a single-family home. By following 12 simple rules, which are outlined in the LGDS standard plan, an LGDS can be installed without too much difficulty.

Our standard plan simply spells out the requirements and offers simple guidelines and suggestions for complying with each requirement. We also have

demonstration walls that show what an LGDS should look like when it is completed. We use these walls during our Graywater workshops to provide a visual example of what the regulations require. Keep an eye out for one of these walls because we move them from time-to-time throughout the county in various city halls and other public spaces in order to get the word out about the use of laundry Graywater for irrigating residential landscaping.

The Ventura County Building and Safety Division will be hosting a series of “how to” workshops for homeowners wanting to install a Graywater system. The workshops will feature hands-on demonstrations of materials needed for an LGDS.

Visit our website at http://www.ventura.org/rma/build_safe/index.htm for more workshop information.

To register for a workshop, e-mail Marie.Becerra@Ventura.org or call (805) 654-2795, from 7:15 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Finally, if you do decide to install an LGDS, remember to use biodegradable soaps and no harsh chemicals. Also, if you wash anything with grease, blood, urine or feces in it, be sure to divert the Graywater to the sewer system where it can be properly treated. Perform regular cleaning and maintenance on your LGDS system to keep in working properly.

By correctly installing and maintaining your LGDS, you will be doing your part to keep an eye on the environment.

Jim MacDonald, CBO, CFM, is the Director of the Ventura County Building and Safety Division He can be reached at (805) 654-2787 or by email at Jim.MacDonald@Ventura.org

The Eye on the Environment column is a public service of the Ventura County Public Works Agency. Those interested in writing guest columns should contact the regular columnist, David Goldstein, at david.goldstein@ventura.org