Monterey County Health Department
Environmental Health Bureau
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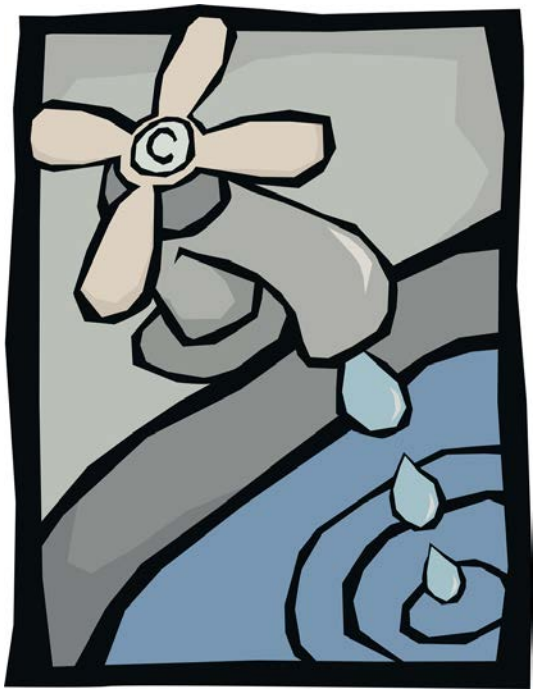
GRAY WATER IRRIGATION SYSTEM
Permitting Process and Design Criteria

INTRODUCTION

Properly installed gray water systems can provide a safe drought proof supply of irrigation water and impart the environmental benefit of conserving drinking water supplies. Gray water is untreated wastewater from bathroom sinks baths/showers and clothes washers. Wastewater from toilets, kitchen sinks and dishwashers is blackwater and must be disposed into a sanitary sewer or an onsite wastewater treatment system. California has recently adopted new standards for outside use (i.e. irrigation). These new standards ease the design criteria; increase the type of gray water dispersal systems that can be used; and exempts a specific type of system (i.e. clothes washer systems) from a construction permit.



The Monterey County Environmental Health Bureau (EHB) is the Administrative Authority for the oversight and permitting of onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS), which include gray water systems, in the unincorporated areas of Monterey County. City building departments may choose to be the permitting agency for properties within their jurisdiction, however Monterey County EHB will be the permitting agency for all properties served by wells and/or septic systems.

PURPOSE

Gray water systems are onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) designed to collect gray water and transport it out of the structure for distribution in an irrigation or disposal field. A gray water system may include tanks, valves, filters, pumps or other appurtenances along with the piping and receiving landscape. OWTS can discharge pollutants to groundwater and are therefore regulated by California Water Code. California Water Code Section 13282 allows the RWQCB to authorize a local public agency to issue permits for and to regulate OWTS "to ensure that systems are adequately designed, located, sized, spaced, constructed and maintained".

The regulations for designing and installing a gray water system are found in the California Code of Regulations Title 24, Part 5 (California Plumbing Code), Chapter 15 – Alternate Water Source for Nonpotable Applications.

The objectives of this guidance document are:

- To make the criteria for the design, installation, operation and maintenance of gray water systems easily accessible to the public.
- To ensure that gray water irrigation/disposal systems will not contaminate groundwater, surface water, or create a public health hazard.
- To explain the permitting procedures and inspection of gray water systems installed within Monterey County.

WHAT CONSTITUTES GRAY WATER

Pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 17922.12, "gray water" means untreated wastewater that has not been contaminated by any toilet discharge, has not been affected by infectious, contaminated, or unhealthy bodily wastes, and does not present a threat from contamination by unhealthful processing, manufacturing, or operating wastes. "Gray water" includes but is not limited to wastewater from bathtubs, showers, bathroom washbasins, clothes washing machines, and laundry tubs, but does not include wastewater from kitchen sinks or dishwashers.

TYPES OF GRAY WATER SYSTEMS

Chapter 15 of the Plumbing Code recognizes four types of gray water systems:

Clothes washer system	A gray water system utilizing only a single domestic clothes washing machine in a one- or two-family dwelling.
Simple system	A gray water system serving a one- or two-family dwelling with a discharge of 250 gallons (947 L) per day or less. Simple systems exceed a clothes washer system and/or a single fixture system.
Complex system	A gray water system that discharges over 250 gallons (947 L) per day.
Treated gray water system	Nonpotable water collected and treated on-site suitable for direct beneficial use.

THE PERMIT PROCESS

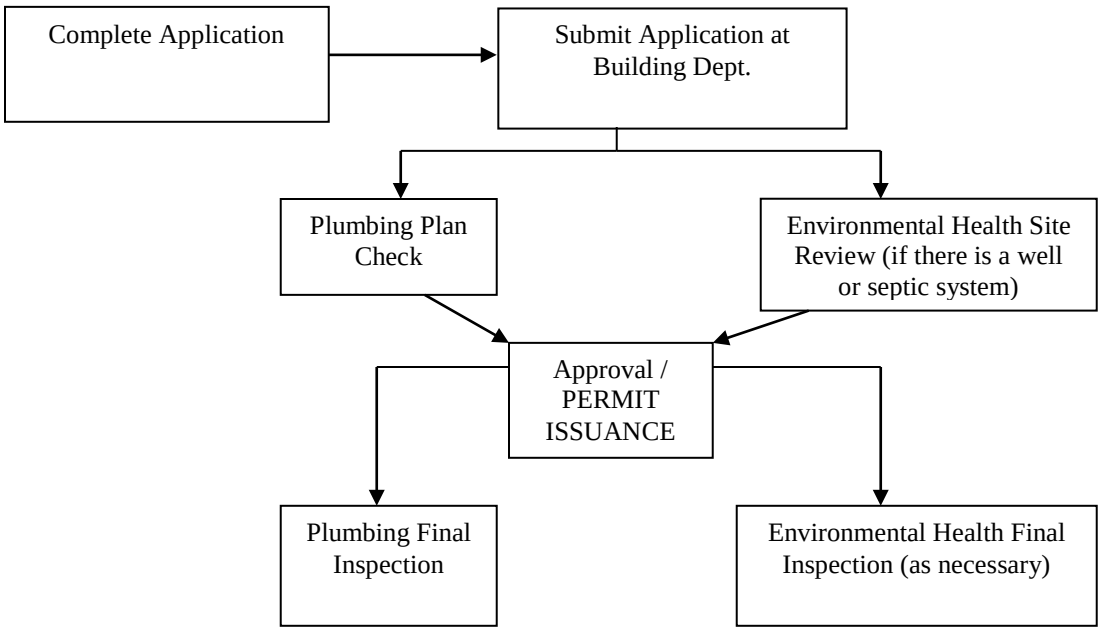
TYPE OF SYSTEM	PERMIT REQUIRED
Clothes washer (laundry) System	No permit required
Simple or Complex Systems	Submit application and fees to Monterey County Resource Management Agency (RMA): Building Services Department 1441 Schilling Place (831) 755-5027 Salinas, CA 93901

1. Clothes washer (laundry) systems: A construction permit is not required. However, the property owner is not exempt from complying with design, installation, and maintenance standards in Chapter 15 of the California Plumbing Code. If there is a complaint investigation that verifies a violation of the applicable standards, then the property owner will be subject to cost recovery and any fines resulting from the investigation. (See Design Criteria on page 5 below)

2. Simple and Complex Systems: A construction permit is required. An application can be obtained at Monterey County RMA-Building Services. The Environmental Health portion can be downloaded at www.mtyhd.org/graywater and completed at home (See Design Criteria on page 5 below).

Prior to submitting any fees or completing any work, it is recommended that the contractor or property owner contact EHB to determine what information is available for the subject property. Property owners or their representatives are encouraged to call or meet with EHB staff to discuss any concerns or questions and to prevent any unnecessary delays or costs when designing or installing a gray water system.

The permit process is outlined below:



REQUIRED APPLICATION MATERIALS

Please review the section below for the information and plot map requirements for the application process. In order to process your application as quickly as possible, the application and plot map must contain the following:

1. Property owners name, home address and telephone number, and Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) of the property, if available.

2. Sketched outline of the property, giving dimensions and the direction of north. Any septic tank and septic system drainfield on the property must be indicated.
3. Identification of all plumbing fixtures that will be draining into the gray water system.
4. Plot plan showing the proposed layout of the entire system, including its connection to any other piping system on the property (see Table 1 on page 7 of this document).
5. Cross-sectional drawing of the gray water disposal field (see Table 3 on page 9).
6. Location and design of backflow prevention air gap separation between make-up (top-off) fresh water supply and the gray water system.
7. A calculation of the maximum expected waste volume per day: Use the typical gray water flows set forth in Section 1502.8.1 of the California Plumbing Code to estimate wastewater volume per day (see example on page 6 below).
8. A calculation of the required disposal area for your system (see Table 2 on page 8).
9. Location of any existing well, whether domestic or irrigation, and whether in use or abandoned, either on the property or within one hundred (100) feet of the property.
10. Location of any existing or proposed embankments with slopes exceeding thirty (30) percent or any existing or proposed downhill cuts whether natural or manmade. Any proposed manmade cuts or excavations depicting height, length and/or area must also be shown (e.g. road cuts, pool/spa excavations, basements, pad cuts etc).
11. Location of ocean, lakes, sloughs, streams, springs, water channels, water courses, reservoirs, water supplies or any other body of water on or adjacent to the property.
12. Location of all recorded easements.
13. Such additional data as may be necessary, in the judgment of the Director, to insure that the proposed method of gray water disposal will not endanger health and sanitation.
14. Depth to groundwater, if known.

DESIGN CRITERIA

Anyone seeking a permit for a residential gray water system should review Chapter 15 of the California Plumbing Code (CPC) for design, installation, and maintenance requirements. Regulations for installation of a washing machine or simple system are summarized below:

1. Gray water can be obtained from clothes washers, showers, bathtubs, and hand washing sinks only. Kitchen sinks and dishwashers shall not be connected to a gray water system.
2. The design shall allow the user to direct the flow to the irrigation or disposal field or the building sewer. The direction control of the gray water shall be clearly labeled and readily accessible to the user. The system shall have an overflow pipe which is permanently connected to the building sewer (see page 10 of this Guide).

3. The installation, change, alteration or repair of the system does not include a potable water connection or a pump and does not affect other building, plumbing, electrical or mechanical components including structural features, egress, fire-life safety, sanitation, potable water supply piping or accessibility.
4. Gray water systems using tanks shall be designed to minimize the amount of time gray water is held in the tank and shall be sized to distribute the total amount of estimated gray water on a daily basis.
5. All storage tanks, pipes, and spigots shall be clearly labeled "Non-potable Water – Do Not Drink".
6. The gray water shall be contained on the site where it is generated.
7. Gray water shall be directed to and contained within an irrigation or disposal field.
8. Ponding or runoff is prohibited and shall be considered a nuisance.
9. Gray water may be released above the ground surface provided at least two (2) inches (51 mm) of mulch, rock, or soil, or a solid shield covers the release point. Other methods which provide equivalent separation are also acceptable.
10. Gray water systems shall be designed to minimize contact with humans and domestic pets.
11. Water used to wash diapers or similarly soiled or infectious garments shall not be used and shall be diverted to the building sewer.
12. Gray water shall not contain hazardous chemicals derived from activities such as cleaning car parts, washing greasy or oily rags, or disposing of waste solutions from home photo labs or similar hobbyist or home occupational activities.
13. 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 the Enforcing Agency.
14. An operation and maintenance manual shall be provided. Directions shall indicate 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.

Note: the public water utility or water system serving your property may require a backflow prevention device to protect its water supply. Details should be obtained from the utility or water system administrator.

Estimate Gray Water Discharge

The gray water discharge for single family and multi-family dwellings shall be calculated by estimates of gray water use based on water use records, calculations of local daily per person interior water use, or the following procedure:

Calculate Daily Flow (Section 1502.8.1, Chapter 15 of CPC).

The number of occupants of each dwelling unit shall be calculated as follows:	
First Bedroom	2 occupants
Each additional bedroom	1 occupant
The estimated gray water flows of each occupant shall be calculated as follows:	
Showers, bathtubs, and wash basins	25 GPD/occupant
Laundry	15 GPD/occupant
The total number of occupants shall be multiplied by the applicable estimated gray water discharge as provided above and the type of fixtures connected to the gray water system. Example: *A 3 bedroom house is considered to have 4 occupants. Four occupants taking a daily shower will be expected to generate 100 gallons/day.*	

DISPOSAL FIELD LOCATION AND CAPACITY

The disposal field location must take into account other structures on the property, such as building foundations, property lines, septic systems, wells, and domestic water lines. They must also be sized according to the type of soil present on the property, as soil type defines the ability of the soil to absorb and percolate water and prevent ponding.

Tables 1502.4, 1502.10, and 1502.11.3 of the California Plumbing Code are provided for reference below. These tables should be used to locate the system on the property and calculate the size of the disposal field and the number of lines and emitters required.

Location of Gray Water System (Table 1502.4, Chapter 15 of CPC)

Minimum Horizontal Distance Required From:	***Surge Tank***	***Subsurface and Subsoil Irrigation Field and Mulch Basin***	***Disposal Field***
	Feet	***Feet***	***Feet***
Building structures[1]	*5* [2,3,9]	*2* [3,8]	*5*
Property line adjoining private property	*5*	*5* [8]	*5*
Water supply wells[3]	*50*	*100*	*100*
Streams and lakes[3]	*50*	*100* [5,10]	*100* [5]
Sewage pits or cesspools	*5*	*5*	*5*
Sewage disposal field	*5*	*4* [6]	*4* [6]
Septic tank	*0*	*5*	*5*
Onsite domestic water service line	*5*	*0*	*0*
Pressurized public water main	*10*	*10*	*10* [7]

See footnotes on next page.

[1] *Building structures does not include* porches and steps, whether covered or uncovered, breezeways, *roofed porte cocheres*, roofed patios, carports, covered walks, covered driveways, and similar structures or appurtenances.
[2] The distance shall be permitted to be reduced to 0 feet for aboveground tanks where first approved by the Environmental Health Bureau.
[3] *Underground tanks shall not be located within a 45 degree angle from the bottom of the foundation, or they shall be designed to address the surcharge imposed by the structure. The distance may be reduced to six (6) inches (153 mm) for aboveground tanks when first approved by RMA-Building Services.*
[3]Where special hazards are involved, the distance required shall be increased as directed by the Environmental Heath Bureau or RMA-Building Services.
[4]These minimum clear horizontal distances shall also apply between the irrigation or disposal field and the ocean mean higher high tide line.
[5] These minimum clear horizontal distances shall apply between the irrigation or disposal field and the ocean mean higher high tide line.
[6] Add 2 feet (610 mm) for each additional foot of depth in excess of one (1) foot (305 mm) below the bottom of the drain line.
[7] For parallel construction or crossings, approval by the Environmental Health Bureau shall be required.
[8] The distance shall be permitted to be reduced to 1 ½ feet (457 mm) for drip and mulch basin irrigation systems.
[9] The distance shall be permitted to be reduced to 0 feet for surge tanks of 75 gallons (284 L) or less.
[10] T*he minimum horizontal distance may be reduced to 50 feet (15,240 mm) for irrigation or disposal fields utilizing gray water which has been filtered prior to entering the distribution piping.*

REQUIRED AREA OF IRRIGATION OR DISPOSAL FIELDS

Irrigation or disposal fields may have one or more valved zones. Each zone must be of adequate size to receive the gray water anticipated in that zone. No irrigation or disposal field shall extend within three (3) vertical feet of the highest known seasonal groundwater, or to a depth where gray water contaminates the groundwater, ocean water or surface water. The applicant shall supply evidence of groundwater depth to the satisfaction of the Enforcing Agency.

Note: The absence of groundwater in a test hole three (3) vertical feet below the deepest irrigation or disposal point shall be sufficient to satisfy this section unless seasonal high groundwater levels have been documented to rise to within this area.

Design Criteria of Six Typical Soils (Tables 1502.10, Chapter 15 of CPC)

Type of Soil	Minimum square feet of irrigation/leaching area per 100 gallons of estimated gray water discharge per day	Maximum absorption capacity in gallons per square foot of irrigation/leaching area for a 24-hour period
	(square feet)	(gallons)
Coarse sand or gravel	20	5.0
Fine sand	25	4.0
Sandy loam	40	2.5
Sandy clay	60	1.7
Clay with considerable sand or gravel	90	1.1
Clay with small amounts of sand or gravel	120	0.8

Subsoil Irrigation Field Construction (Table 1502.11.3, Chapter 15 of CPC)

DESCRIPTION	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Number of drain lines per valved zone[1]	1	—
Length of each perforated line[1]	—	100 feet
Bottom width of trench[1]	12 inches	24 inches
Spacing of lines, center to center[1]	4 feet	—
Depth of earth cover of lines	2 inches	—
Depth of filter material cover of lines	2 inches	—
Depth of filter material beneath lines[1]	3 inches	—
Grade of perforated lines	level	3 inches per 100 feet

[1] Manufactured leaching chambers shall be installed in compliance with the manufacturer's installation instructions.

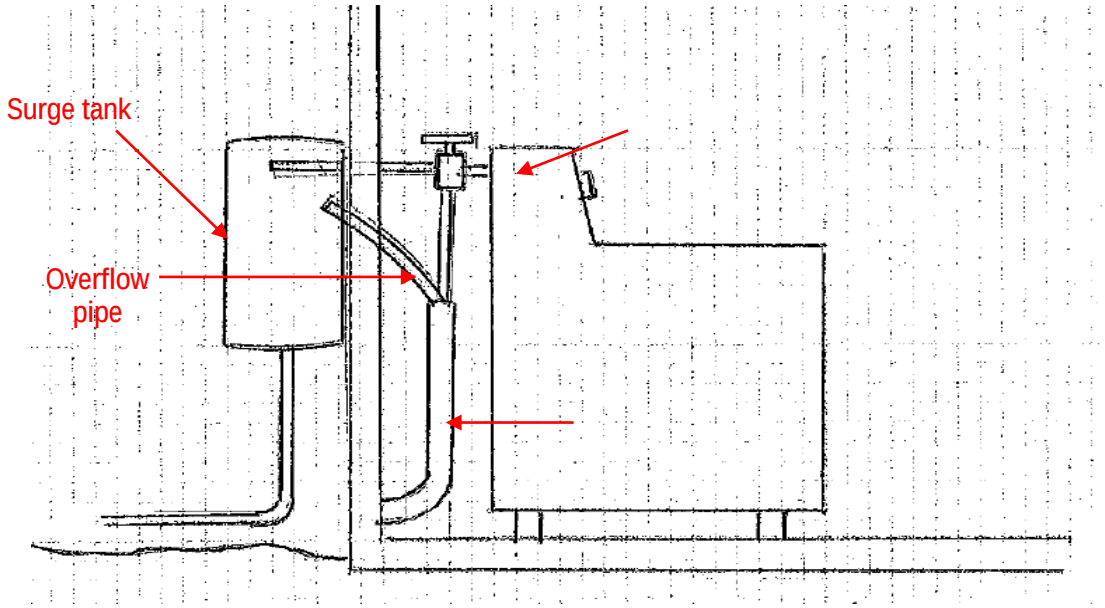
When necessary on sloping ground to prevent excessive line slopes, disposal lines shall be stepped or installed on the contour lines of the slope. The lines between each horizontal leaching section shall be made with approved water-tight joints and installed on natural or unfilled ground.

3-WAY VALVE REQUIRED

ALL gray water systems must have a way of diverting water from the gray water system to the sewer or septic tank. A 3-way valve is appropriate way to control the flow of water. Gray water must be redirected to the sanitary sewer or septic system under the following conditions:

- Rainy weather
- When the receiving soil becomes saturated
  (rather than pooling on the ground or running off to a neighbor's property)
- Washing diapers or other soiled laundry

TYPICAL 3-WAY VALVES

allows fixture to discharge to either the gray water system of the sewer/septic system

Any surge tank or container meant to receive gray water temporarily must also have an overflow pipe permanently connected to the building sewer.