

SUNNYVALE

County puts off gray water decision

City awaits policy review by county

By **Tiffany Carney**

Bay Area News Group

Sunnyvale officials are waiting for the county to develop a filtered gray water system policy before deciding whether the city should move forward with its own guidelines.

The council unanimously decided Sept. 29 to delay making changes to control the installation of residential gray water systems for at least 90 days so staff can attend the Santa Clara Valley Water District's County Graywater Working Group.

The group formed in August to put together county-wide guidelines after the state approved an emergency adoption of standards to make it easier for residents to use recycled water during the drought. The new standards allow residents to install gray water systems. Previously, the installation of residential systems was not permitted. All pipes had to connect to the sewer. Now, pipes can drain into gardens and other areas.

The Graywater Working Group could put additional model guidelines in place, above and beyond what the state has done.

"The state has taken action, and all we're suggesting is the council not take action now, unilaterally when the county is getting together and deciding to come up with the guidance that we can give to our residents," said Marvin Rose, director of public works.

The state's Health and Safety Code says gray water includes, but is not limited to, wastewater from bathtubs, showers, bathroom washbasins, clothes washing machines and laundry tubs.

Water from kitchen sinks or dishwashers is not considered gray water. Gray water can be used for things such as watering plants.

The state's revised standards began Aug. 4 and will remain in effect for at least 180 days.

Sunnyvale had been working on its own guidelines when the state passed the emergency standards. According to the city staff report, gray water reuse systems can be beneficial to the city to offset the use of potable water for landscape irrigation, toilet flushing and other uses.

"By reusing grey water, a person can reduce the amount of potable water he or she uses by 50 percent," according to an article titled, "Graywater use is now simpler! Another way to save water!" by League of Women Voters of Southwest Santa Clara County Valley.

Gray water systems are used currently in Sunnyvale and are indicated by the lavender piping in businesses at the north end of the city for irrigation purposes.

Residential gray water reuse systems would not involve city infrastructure, but would require citywide education about uses and concerns, the report states.

A discussion in 2008 at a city council meeting prompted the gray water filtering and reuse study issue, sponsored by councilmen Dave Whittum and Ron Swegles.

Sunnyvale uses the California Plumbing Code, in which the revised standards are included.

The intent of the city code revisions was to conserve water with greater reuse of laundry, shower, lavatory and similar sources of discharge for irrigation and or indoor use.

"I just want to stress how important an issue this is from my experience," said Sunnyvale resident Dan Hafeman, who uses a very "primitive" method of recycling gray water. "We set a bucket on the discharge on our washing machine and capture 3 to 4 gallons every time we wash clothes." Hafeman then watered his fruit trees with the collected gray water.

Hafeman said he'd like to install a gray water system, but would appreciate some guidance from the city.