

*Tucson Citizen, August 26, 2008*

## Clearly, water reuse not a gray area

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The city of Tucson is looking to take a positive step forward in water conservation by requiring gray-water harvesting. All new homes built within city limits would be plumbed for gray-water harvesting under the proposed ordinance. That used household water comes from washing machines, showers and bathroom sinks. It can't be used for drinking, but it can water desert landscapes.

The proposed mandate is an excellent idea for any community, but especially for Tucson, where we rely mostly on groundwater and where water always has been and always will be a precious resource. Commercial buildings already are required to harvest rainwater and stormwater runoff from surfaces such as roofs and parking lots. Also, commercial landscaping must "accomplish energy, water and other natural resource conservation."

Harvesting rainwater is a great thing to require at commercial buildings, and the next logical step is to expand the principle to dwellings.

The average cost to pre-plumb a new home for a gray-water harvesting system would be \$500. But state tax credits would reduce the cost to about \$300.

Edward Taczanowsky, president of the [Southern Arizona Home Builders Association](#), expressed concern that consumers would not be willing to pay for a system they may or may not have wanted. SAHBA initially opposed the mandate, but the organization now fully endorses the proposition of gray-water harvesting in new homes. If any homebuyers oppose water conservation for some reason, the actual act of gray-water harvesting isn't required.

The homes would simply be fitted with a starter pack that would make the final installation a quick, painless and inexpensive process. And though the housing market is struggling, an extra \$300 tacked on the price of a home costing hundreds of thousands of dollars is a highly unlikely deterrent.

Opponents may say this proposition is insignificant because most home building in the Tucson area isn't within city limits. But if the ordinance were enacted, Tucson could be a role model not only for our close neighbors such as Sahuarita, Marana, Vail and Oro Valley, but also for towns across the state and country where houses are being built at a faster clip.

New homes are much more energy-efficient than older ones, with or without gray-water harvesting, SAHBA notes. Older homes are often poorly insulated and fit with inefficient windows, air conditioning, dishwashers and the like. The cost and effort required to retrofit an older Tucson home to be eco-friendly is substantially greater than the \$300 needed to install a gray-water system in a new home.

The gray-water proposition is an inexpensive, realistic, common-sense approach to water recycling, and all of Tucson should support it. Making all new homes a tiny bit more eco-friendly will have a big impact on Tucson as a whole.

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