 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk2***

ABC Radio interview No.50 – 6th May 2020

**Home Projects #3 – Setting up a Greywater System**

**When Landcare’s Greening the Hill Mk2 initiative was launched just over twelve months ago, all our projects were focussed on the many opportunities by which we can individually and collectively become more sustainable in the way we live.**

Because Landcare Broken Hill is determined to work with the whole Broken Hill community to ensure we all become sustainable in the way we live, many of the ***Greening the Hill Mk2*** projects were launched with an intention to encourage more sustainable modes of living.

Today I wish to talk about 2 inter-connected ***Greening the Hill Mk2*** projects: Project #18 which is our “Sustainable Living & Housing Project” and Project #30, which is our “Education on the reuse of greywater Project” Now, I’ve talked about these projects before but always in general terms.

What has surprised me is the number of times people have said to me, with great assertiveness, that there are regulations which prevent some of the things I’ve been talking about proceeding. In particular, people have firmly said that grey water systems are prohibited or that they require such a level of permitting that it places the installation of a grey water system out of the financial (or affordable) reach of the ordinary citizen.

Well, with the assistance of a colleague, I’ve carried out some research into the law. And today I’m going to **dispel some myths** regarding **greywater use in your home garden**.

The answers lie in two pieces of NSW law: the **Local Government Act 1993**, which I’ll call the Act, and in the **Local Government (General) Regulations 2005**, which I’ll call the Regulations.

The next thing is to fix in our mind what we’re talking about. What we are talking about is a **greywater diversion device** **(GDD)** that diverts untreated greywater, by gravity or pump, directly to subsurface irrigation. This is not to be confused with a **greywater treatment system (GTS).** If I was to be talking about a GTS, an actual treatment system, then yes, a strict regime of compliance requiring permits from Broken Hill City Council would apply.

But with a GDD, a diversion device, it falls within item 10 of Part F of the Table in s.68 of the Act, which simply means it is “**an activity prescribed by the regulations or an activity of a class or description prescribed by the regulations**”. This means we are now directed to the Regulation to see what is controlled.

So we go to the Regulations and look at Division 5, which relates to “Approvals relating to … other activities”, which takes us to Subdivision 6 which is helpfully headed “Domestic greywater diversion” where we then find cl.75A which contains the nuts and bolts detail. Here follows the classic artifice of the legal draftsman: cl.75A(1) starts with the words “**domestic greywater diversion is prescribed as an activity that requires the prior approval of the council**”. Without reading on we might now think we have to get Council approval for our greywater diverter. But no! The very next sentence, in cl.75A(2) says: “**However, domestic greywater diversion may be carried out without the prior approval of the council if”—** What then followsare some standards, meet them and then you’ll be OK; or if you don’t meet them, then you’ll need to go to Council for approval or, failing that you’ll be in breach and could be liable for a penalty. (Up to 20 penalty units = $2,200)

So what are these standards that you must meet in order to sidestep having to get permission from the Council. **First**, **your greywater diverter needs to comply with the Plumbing Code of Australia** – so some helpful advice from your friendly plumber could help, or some helpful advice from the sales staff at your local plumbing supplies – about the fittings required to divert. Either way, satisfying the Plumbing Code is a straightforward step of getting the right bits and pieces and assembling them properly.

**Secondly**, you can’t go ahead if you have an actual sewage management facility on your property. I think most of us would know if we have a proper sewage treatment facility constructed on our block. If you haven’t, keep going.

**Thirdly**, and here’s the rub, you must satisfy the following performance standards:

* + - The prevention of the spread of disease by micro-organisms,
    - The prevention of the spread of foul odours,
    - The prevention of contamination of water,
    - The prevention of degradation of soil and vegetation,
    - The discouragement of insects and vermin,
    - Ensuring that persons do not come into contact with untreated sewage …,
    - The minimisation of any adverse impacts on the amenity of the premises concerned and the surrounding lands.

Surprisingly, all those factors are normally easily managed as in a warm and dry climate, like that in Broken Hill, greywater will normally rapidly percolate down into the soil. If not, it will soon evaporate. We are not talking about ‘black water’ which has solids, we’re talking about greywater which is defined in the Regulation as “**waste from washing machines, laundry tubs, showers, hand basins and baths**, but does **not** include wastewater from a kitchen, toilet, urinal or bidet”. And the system we’re talking about is also defined: *Domestic* *greywater* diversion’ means the installation and operation of a system for **diverting greywater generated on residential premises to a garden or lawn on those premises.**

So I’ve taken you down a regulatory pathway and we’ve arrived at the following conclusions:

1. A domestic greywater diversion system **can be** set up in NSW without the need for Council approval;
2. The greywater you’re diverting can only be from washing machines, laundry tubs, showers, hand basins and baths;
3. You can only use your greywater on your garden or lawn;
4. As you need to comply with the Plumbing Code of Australia when you divert your pipes, you’d be wise to consult your plumber or your plumbing suppliers;
5. You have to comply with 7 standards which seek to avoid causing a nuisance or lessening amenity, none of which should be difficult to meet, especially in hot and dry Outback NSW.

I’m of the opinion that, providing your greywater is only to put on the garden/lawn and providing you meet the standards such as not creating odours, you can install a holding tank to retain the greywater until you’ve got time to disperse the water on to the garden or on the lawn at your convenience.

Given the source of the water, I think it would be difficult to meet the standards if you were to use a pump to push the water through an above ground sprayer or sprinkler. I suspect that if the water thus becomes airborne, it would potentially breach the standards.

A sensible way of dispersing your greywater would be to connect it directly to a dripper system or soaker hose and allow gravity to feed the water to the outlets. In this way you could partly cover the dripper hose, ensuring that the water does nothing other than sink straight down, whilst at the same time taking the water directly to plants that need it most.

**Landcare Broken Hill’s public meetings have been cancelled for the foreseeable future due to COVID-19.**

**All Landcare Broken Hill’s on-the-ground projects have been deferred until further notice, although ‘backroom’ planning and preparation continues.**

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