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CSU professors push gray-water recycling at Legislature

By [Joe Hanel](#) Herald Staff Writer

DENVER – Households could save up to half their water if they could reuse “gray water” from shower and sink drains, two Colorado State University professors said last week.

The duo convinced state legislators to at least consider changes in restrictive state laws governing gray water.

“We spend a lot of money to treat water to potable quality, and then we use it to either irrigate or flush toilets,” said Sybil Sharvelle, an assistant professor at CSU.

Sharvelle and professor Larry Roesner want the Legislature to pass a law that gives state water regulators the power to write new rules for reusing water from showers, sinks and washing machines.

They have run tests for several years on household systems that collect used water in tanks about the size of a hot-water heater and redirect the water into toilets or gardens.

Legislators on the Water Resources Review Committee voted 9-0 Wednesday to start writing a bill to be introduced in 2012, although some lawmakers had qualms about it.

“I’m a little gun shy, but I guess it doesn’t hurt for us to draft a bill and take a look,” said Rep. Jerry Sonnenberg, R-Sterling.

Sonnenberg’s hesitation stems from one of the unresolved questions about gray water. His largely agricultural district lies downhill from Denver, and if many people in the metro area start reusing their water instead of literally flushing it down the drain, it could lead to less water in the rivers downstream.

State Engineer Dick Wolfe said Colorado regulates gray water differently depending on a person’s water rights and whether the water comes from a well or a city utility.

Leaders of Denver Water, the state’s largest water utility, would appreciate the chance to experiment with gray water to see how well the systems work.

“We’ve held gray water at arm’s length for a number of years, mostly because the regulations are unclear,” said Greg Fisher, manager of demand planning for Denver Water.

The Legislature’s water committee will take another look at a proposed bill when it meets again Oct. 17.

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