

WATER QUALITY CONTROL COMMISSION
Water Quality Regulations and the Beneficial Use of Water
March 12, 2014

Introduction

On May 14, 2013, Governor Hickenlooper issued an Executive Order directing the Colorado Water Conservation Board to develop a Colorado Water Plan in consultation with other state agencies, including the Water Quality Control Division and Commission. The Division and Commission are working on the water quality elements of the Colorado Water Plan, and will look at the relationship between water quantity and quality. In addition, our efforts to seek improvements to permit processes to reduce redundancy and unnecessary expenditure of taxpayer resources will identify opportunities for assisting in meeting future consumptive and non-consumptive water needs. In times of ever increasing shortage of water supply, energy, and other natural resources, the Commission has several unique regulations that allow the people in Colorado to make beneficial use of treated wastewater and its byproducts. The State Engineer's Office also relies upon Commission adopted standards in making certain water use decisions. These enactments contribute to the viability of a more sustainable environment.

Graywater

In response to legislation passed in 2013, the Division is working with its stakeholders to develop a new regulation that will allow the use of graywater in Colorado. Generally speaking, graywater is water from hand washing, showers, and the like that can be treated minimally and recycled for use within that same system. The Division is currently working with local governments and other interested stakeholders to determine what this water can be used for, such as lawn irrigation and indoor toilet flushing. The regulation will establish minimum standards statewide, but each local government will retain the ability to decide on its own whether to allow the use of graywater within its jurisdiction, and will be responsible for implementing and overseeing its use with assistance from the Division. The Commission will consider the proposed regulation in January 2015.

Reclaimed Water

Similar to graywater, reclaimed water is treated wastewater that is allowed to be used for beneficial purposes. Reclaimed water is highly treated but not quite drinkable water that is then used for landscape and agricultural irrigation, fire protection, and other commercial and industrial uses such as cooling water. The Commission has regulations to ensure the reclaimed water is treated to a degree that is protective of the risks imposed depending on the ultimate use. In response to increased demand for the use of reclaimed water, the Commission adopted revisions to these regulations in the past year to allow broader use of reclaimed water.

State Engineer's Regulations

The State Engineer has adopted regulations governing the "quality" of the substitute water used in exchanges and substitute water supply plans. Such regulations state that in judging the acceptability of the quality of the substitute supply, any standards or classifications adopted by the Commission "shall be considered in determining water requirements of senior appropriators....For example, if the senior beneficial use is agricultural in nature, then the appropriate standards for agricultural use may be applied...." These regulations also apply a presumption of acceptability to waters discharged in compliance with a permit issued by the Water Quality Control Division or to waters treated in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Resources to Address Water Quality Issues

Substantial additional information about Colorado's water quality programs can be found on the Commission's (www.colorado.gov/cdphe/wqcc) and Division's (www.colorado.gov/cdphe/wqcd) web sites. If legislators need information about any aspects of Colorado's water quality programs, a good option is to contact Karin McGowan (303-692-3473) or Eliza Schultz (303-692-3471) with CDPHE, who can make sure that inquiries and issues are referred to the appropriate contacts.