

What is Graywater?

Graywater is wastewater from the galley drains, dishwasher, laundry, sinks, and showers onboard a vessel.

State Water Quality Standards and the Federal Vessel General Permit (VGP)

Commercial vessel operators must follow the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Vessel General Permit (VGP) and Washington state law requirements for disposal of graywater while in Washington waters. Graywater discharges are regulated under the Clean Water Act (CWA), VGP Section 2.2, Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 90.48.080, and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 173-201A. The VGP document can be found at <http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/>. State guidance on the VGP can be found at: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/permits/VGP/index.html

General requirements for vessel operators

1. Minimize the discharge of graywater while in port. If you can store it aboard or pump it ashore, then you must do so.
2. If you cannot store graywater aboard or pump it ashore, you should minimize the production of graywater in port, at anchor, or within one nautical mile (nm) of shore.
3. Reduce harm from the discharge of graywater:
 - Don't drain cooking or kitchen oils to your graywater system.
 - No oil should be discharged in quantities that violate water quality standards or cause a visible sheen, film, sludge, or emulsion on the water, in the water, or on the shoreline.
 - Scrape and wipe food and oil residue from dishes as much as possible before placing in wash or rinse water that will be discharged with graywater.
 - Use only phosphate free and non-toxic soaps and detergents.

Vessel specific requirements

For commercial vessels greater than 400 gross tons

In addition to the requirements above, if you can store graywater then you must do one of the following:

- Discharge your graywater ashore.
- Be underway and farther than one nautical mile (nm) from shore before discharging untreated graywater.
- Appropriately treat your graywater to meet the standards and requirements in Parts 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 or 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 of the VGP and then you may discharge graywater within one nm of shore.

WHY IT MATTERS

Untreated graywater can contain oil and high levels of bacteria and nutrients that threaten the health of our waters. Graywater discharges threaten public health and the public's right to use and enjoy state waters.

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Special accommodations

To ask about the availability of this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Water Quality Program at (360) 407-6600.

Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call (877) 833-6341.

Commercial vessels over 79 feet (excluding fishing vessels)

- Within one nm of shore, minimize the discharge of graywater.
- If you can store graywater, you must dispose of it on shore if facilities are available and the disposal is economically practicable and achievable.
- In the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS), if you can store graywater, you must not discharge any graywater in this area. If you cannot store graywater, minimize the production and disposal of it.
- In nutrient impaired waters, including many Washington lakes (the full list is available at www.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/vessel_impair_nutrient.pdf), if you can store graywater, you must do so. If you cannot store the graywater, you must:
 - Minimize graywater production and discharge.
 - Discharge while underway in areas with significant circulation and depth to the extent possible.

Note: While Puget Sound is not currently listed by EPA for nutrient pollution problems, parts of it may become listed in 2010.

If you mix graywater and sewage together, then you must comply with the effluent limits for graywater discharge in Part 2 and 5 of the VGP and section 312 of the Clean Water Act (see 40 CFR Part 140 and 33 CFR Part 159). Discharges of graywater mixed with sewage must meet both graywater and sewage standards to be in compliance.

Cruise ships and large ferries

The VGP also contains additional requirements for graywater from Cruise Vessels (Parts 5.1 and 5.2) and Large Ferries (Part 5.3) which are not discussed in detail in this focus sheet. The Department of Ecology, Port of Seattle, and Northwest Cruise Ship Association negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/cruise_mou/) to improve the treatment of waste discharges from cruise ships operating in Washington waters, including graywater discharges.

Pollution regulations and what to watch for if discharging graywater

State law forbids discharges that cause pollution. This includes creating an oil sheen, film, sludge, or foam from a graywater discharge. Bacteria and nutrients, such as phosphorus or nitrogen, in graywater could also cause noncompliance with state water quality standards.

WAC 173-201A-260 is the overall state standard for marine and fresh water quality. Discharges of graywater must not adversely affect characteristic water uses, the most sensitive biota dependent upon those waters, or public health. Discharges must not be offensive to sight, smell, touch, or taste.

Additional information is available at www.ecy.wa.gov/laws-rules/index.html :

- WAC 173-201A-200 - criteria for fresh waters
- WAC 173-201A-210 - criteria for marine waters
- WAC 173-201A-230 - criteria for lakes

Reporting violations

You are required to control discharges to meet applicable state water quality standards in the receiving waterbody or any other waterbody impacted by your discharges. If at any time you become aware, or the state or EPA determines that your graywater discharge does not meet water quality standards, you must take the corrective actions in Part 3 of the VGP and report the violation to the EPA as required in Parts 1.13 and 4.4.1 of the VGP.