



AIA Washington Council

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Issue Brief

Sustainable Development — Water Conservation Support HB 2584 with Changes

Background

Rainwater catchment systems capture rainwater and stormwater runoff and reuse it on a building site. State law on the use of rainwater catchment systems is unclear. Even so, hundreds of such systems have been installed, saving millions of gallons of water use each year. The use of captured rainwater decreases the demand for treated water and lessens the demands on taking water from rivers, streams, lakes and aquifers. Water captured is put back into the water treatment system or naturally filtered on site over time.

In most instances, the use of captured water directly replaces the use of treated potable water. Thus, the use of captured water lessens the burden on water and sewer treatment systems, including well and septic systems. Capturing also helps to control pollution caused by rainwater taking with it pollutants from roads, rooftops, and other impervious surfaces that otherwise flow into surface water. If rainwater is captured and used for irrigation, it is naturally filtered. If used in a building, the water enters the sanitary sewer system for treatment.

HB 2584 is a Good First Step, but Needs Improvement

The AIA/WA supports the general direction of HB 2584. We agree that rainwater and stormwater capturing should be exempt from water right permitting and certain systems should be exempt from regulation by the Department of Ecology (DOE). In general, water catchments systems positively contribute to the environment and water quality and should be encouraged.

The 5,000 gallon exemption from permitting in the bill is too small to promote the use of such systems. A typical house with four residents would need a system more than twice that size for just average daily use. Thus, the low exemption level will not facilitate residential systems of much practical use. An office building with a parking lot would need a substantially larger system.

HB 2584 would require existing systems to be retroactively approved by the Department of Ecology after the DOE completes rulemaking to implement the bill. The prospect of existing systems having to undertake expensive retrofitting or even removal would create an undue hardship with no environmental benefits. AIA/WA suggests that existing systems should be exempted from new permitting requirements. But, these systems should report information about their size to DOE.

The AIA/WA is also concerned about lengthy rulemaking to implement the bill. The bill requires many factors to be considered and the rule making would be complicated. **It would be better to provide a blanket exemption for systems in statute and then require DOE to develop rules on reporting requirements.** DOE should also have to justify why a system should not be allowed, rather than putting the burden of proof on the project owner. The AIA/WA would support a requirement for systems to be registered with DOE, so they can track their sizes and placements. This would give Ecology valuable information for monitoring the impact on watersheds without placing an undue burden or restriction on catchment systems.

HB 2584 is going in the right direction. With some modification it would greatly benefit our citizens and the environment.