

Raindrops May Be Falling on Your House, But You Still Can't Drink Them

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By [David Barer](#)



Photo by Terrence Henry/StateImpact Texas

Legislation currently being considered at the Capitol would make it easier for Texans to harvest rainwater.

Conversation swirled around water at the [House Natural Resources Committee](#) meeting today at the Capitol. The committee discussed [dozens of water bills](#) regarding groundwater, desalination, the border between Texas and Oklahoma and even [rainwater harvesting](#).

The bill for the latter, [HB 2781](#), would allow people with a public water supply connection to collect rainwater for potable purposes. People living in rural, unincorporated areas already have that right.

[Rep. Allen Fletcher](#), R-Cypress, said when he started writing the legislation he didn't realize he was writing a cleanup bill for legislation passed in the last session. [A previous bill](#), written by [Rep. Doug Miller](#), R-New Braunfels, who sits on the Natural Resources Committee, was supposed to allow most people to install potable rainwater collection systems, but complications with the language in the bill stopped it short of its original intent.

“It was brought to my attention that the people of Texas weren't being allowed to use their rainwater at their homes as they saw fit and I just thought it was common sense legislation,” Fletcher said.

The new bill would clean up the complications and clarify regulations, Fletcher said.

In a twist of fate, the ongoing drought has spurred a renaissance in rainwater harvesting. Proponents of the practice say the water has exceptional quality, are environmentally friendly and systems pay for themselves over time. Rainwater can be used for landscaping, taking some of the strain off municipal freshwater supplies for lawns and gardening. One Texan has even [gone into business selling bottled rainwater](#), which he calls “cloud juice.”

But not everyone agrees that allowing city dwellers to have rainwater systems is such a good idea. Monty Lowell, a master plumber and former Commercial Plumbing Plans Examiner with the City of Austin, testified against the bill at the meeting. He testified representing only himself.

Lowell said rainwater collection installers aren’t properly educated on a variety of plumbing codes, regulations and practices. Plus, he said, plumbing is dangerous.

“Everything that plumbers are involved with can kill you. Water systems can kill you. Waste systems can kill you,” Lowell said.

Rep. Miller, the author of the prior rainwater harvesting bill, pushed back.

“Isn’t this really about protecting the plumbers so they can make money off plumbing all this on the buildings?” he asked. “I know when I passed this bill last time that I had the plumbers against me and I had the major cities that sell water against me,” he added later.

Lowell said his protest had nothing to do with money. The rainwater harvesting bill was left pending in committee.

Proponents of drought-friendly landscaping did have at least one victory today, however. Another bill, [SB 198](#) by Sen. Kirk Watson, which would bar home owners associations from [banning drought-resistant landscaping](#) (aka xeriscaping) was passed unanimously by the committee (it already passed in the Senate). That bill now heads to the House floor, and from there could head to the Governor for approval.

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