U.S. EPA WaterSense

Questions & Answers

About the WaterSense Program

Why does the United States need a water efficiency program?

Water is a finite resource. Between 70 and 75 percent of the Earth's surface is covered with water, but only 1 percent of that is available for human use. While both world population and the demand for freshwater resources are increasing, supply remains constant. Water efficiency helps preserve our water supply for future generations.

Is water supply an issue everywhere in the United States?

There are many markets in the United States that already face water shortages, and the number of markets facing this issue is projected to grow in the future. A Government Accountability Office survey of water managers across the country showed that 36 states were anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages by 2013, even under non-drought conditions. Water efficiency is a much more cost-effective tool to help local markets manage water supply issues than developing new sources.

How can water efficiency help local communities?

Water supply infrastructure is a major cost for most local markets across the United States. In 2002, an EPA report identified a $224 billion gap in planned infrastructure investment as compared to needs. Water efficiency is one key way that local communities can help manage their infrastructure needs.

Which areas of the country have the largest water supply challenges?

Water use varies greatly depending on geographic location and season, largely as a result of differences in climate. For instance, water use needs tend to be higher in the West and Southwest than in the East or Midwest. However, water and wastewater infrastructure systems across the country are being challenged by population growth and aging components. Water efficiency can lessen the stress on these systems and extend their useful life. Further complicating the issue of water supply and availability is the fact that population growth is greatest in states that have more limited water resources.

Why did EPA create WaterSense?

EPA realized that managing water supplies was becoming an increasingly important issue to local markets around the country. Through this national program, local water utilities, product manufacturers, and retailers will work with EPA to encourage water-efficient products and practices among consumer and commercial audiences.

What is the goal of WaterSense?

The main goal of the program is to decrease indoor and outdoor non-agricultural water use through more efficient products, equipment, and systems and create a program that helps customers differentiate between products in the marketplace, while ensuring product performance and encouraging innovation in manufacturing.

How will success be measured?

EPA will estimate gallons of water saved by individuals and organizations purchasing water-efficient products instead of those that use more water. EPA will also examine the savings that result from using irrigation professionals that are certified in water-efficient installation and maintenance practices and the increase in awareness of water-efficient products and practices.

Has EPA involved stakeholders in the WaterSense program development?

From the beginning, stakeholders have been working with EPA on the development of this program. This includes the initial request for the program by a group of more than 100 stakeholders, periodic stakeholder meetings and conference calls, and ongoing posting of communication about the program on the EPA's water efficient product market enhancement Web site <www.epa.gov/watersense>.

What products will be included in the WaterSense program?

Irrigation products and contractors are among the first categories in the program, along with high-efficiency toilets and faucet products. EPA plans to research several options to expand product areas in the future, including additional indoor and outdoor home products, as well as commercial products.

How will water-efficient products be labeled/recognized?

EPA is developing a certification mark that Partners can use in marketing products that meet the WaterSense criteria for efficiency and performance. This mark will be used as a label on product packaging, featured on in-store displays, and found in manufacturer literature and Web sites. Furthermore, shoppers can visit <www.epa.gov/watersense> later in 2006 to see a registry of certified products.

How are specifications for products being determined?

For each product under consideration, EPA is conducting extensive research to analyze potential specifications. Draft efficiency and performance criteria are developed as an open process, and EPA solicits input from stakeholders to ensure that the most appropriate criteria for each product category before finalizing the specification.

How will EPA ensure that products meet the criteria?

Manufacturers will self-certify that their products meet or exceed the criteria before they are allowed to use the label or have their products listed on the WaterSense Web site. EPA requires third-party testing to ensure compliance with the specification.

How does EPA plan to coordinate with local water utilities?

Local water utilities have been very supportive in the development of the program. Many utilities already have efforts in place to increase the water efficiency of residential and commercial irrigation systems. Utilities will be encouraged to use the program as part of their local water efficiency and conservation efforts.

What more can I do to save water for future generations?

EPA conducts a number of activities to encourage consumers and organizations to use less water. Information on how to use water efficiently is posted on our Web site and available on our fact sheets and other publications. This new program adds the product focus to our ongoing activities.

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