



# Lessons Learned from the Introductory Contractor Program

December 2, 2009

## **2009 Irrigation Association Conference & Exposition**

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# Program Concept

- No current program that focused on the professional sector
- An educational program featuring proactive management, which includes design and maintenance components, to ensure long term **plant health** and **reduce** water usage.
- Not a certification program but work with other professional groups for the participant's CEU's
- “Borrow” shamelessly from other successful programs.

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# A Brief History...

- WaterSaver Landscape Contractor Pilot Program was initiated in 2007
- Initial problems:
  - Continuing drought and attention to regulatory issues delayed start
  - Immediately realized a Technician/Field Worker component was necessary
  - Spent additional time evaluating other successful programs
  - Spent considerable time reaching consensus with disparate groups

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# A Brief History...

- In 2007,
  - Created “soft” openings for field staff while discussing professional education
  - Increase attendance with each successive workshop
  - Had a waiting list
  - Instituted recommendations from each event into the next workshop

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# A Brief History

- In 2008,
  - Reach consensus on Professional and Technician Format, Best Management Practices, and Calendar of Events
  - Held a two day Professional Workshop (14 hours): Regulations, Design, Maintenance, and Irrigation
  - Held four ½ Day Workshops: Planting, Maintenance, Irrigation Design & Regulation, Plant Identification. All with overall emphasis on water conservation
- Results?

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# Lessons...

- Knew landscapers, irrigators, and landscape architects seldom interacted, but the lack of knowledge was disconcerting.
- Professionals felt two days was too long
- Although attendance was high for ½ Day Workshops (ave.33), companies still felt information provided did not cover their needs or water conservation.
- Designated WaterSaver Landscape Contractors: 3 irrigators, 5 landscapers, 1 landscape architect

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# Lessons...

- On the whole, irrigators found the information more pertinent than landscapers – “knew plastic but not plants/soil”
- All three professions better understood the importance of site characteristics, design, plant palatte, and scheduling.
- We better understood contractor day to day issues and education deficiencies
- (Personally) Found out that Professional and State requirements for CEU’s differ greatly

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# Changes...

- Institute a single 6 hour Professional course emphasizing local regulations and technical education (i.e. both plastic & plant) based on Xeric Principles.
- Retain the four ½ Day Workshops but emphasize scheduling, specific pest & maintenance issues (i.e. trouble shoot), plant-soil-water concepts, and plant id.
- Provide examples of WaterSaver Landscape contracts.
- Create irrigation schedule based on site for everyone.
- Retain services of professional trainer to develop state recognized materials for Irrigator CEU's

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## Estimated Water Savings (cost/benefit analysis)

- Training landscapers and irrigators on efficient irrigation
  - Residential: 3 events/week > 1 event/week
  - Small Commercial: 3 events/week > 2 events/week
  - Large Commercial: 4 events/week > 2 events/week
- Estimated water saved per year: 109 AF
- Next step > follow a sample through year.

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