

# WaterSense Label Offers Opportunities for Irrigation Controllers

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**Abstract.** *The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program is gearing up to label weather-based irrigation controllers. EPA is partnering with manufacturers, retailers, and distributors, and is collaborating with water utilities and irrigation professionals, to bring the first WaterSense labeled irrigation products to the marketplace. Learn the five essential things that will help you successfully leverage the WaterSense label. Attend this session to:*

- 1. Understand the key weather-based irrigation controller specification criteria;*
- 2. Find out what the WaterSense label represents and how manufacturers should use it;*
- 3. Explore the advantages of using the label and hear examples of labeling success stories;*
- 4. Learn how partners can get more out of using the WaterSense label through activities such as product promotion and collaboration with other partners; and*
- 5. Learn how the product certification and labeling process benefits the irrigation industry.*

**Keywords.** WaterSense, water-efficient, weather-based irrigation controllers, certification

There are more than 13.5 million irrigation systems currently installed in the United States. Replacing existing standard clock timer controllers or installing new WaterSense labeled weather-based irrigation controllers could offer a significant water-saving opportunity for homeowners and organizations that use irrigation systems.

On November 3, 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) WaterSense® program announced the release of the final WaterSense Specification for Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers. EPA's goal is to recognize and label weather-based irrigation controllers that can deliver a high level of performance and that will help guide the landscape irrigation industry toward improved water efficiency.

The release of this final specification is the result of more than four years of collaboration between EPA and controller manufacturers, water utilities, irrigation industry representatives, and other stakeholders. Since the release of a Notification of Intent to develop this specification in 2007, EPA has held several public meetings, gathered various working groups, conducted independent research, and worked with numerous experts to determine appropriate performance characteristics to ensure that labeled products provide efficient irrigation.

In November 2009, WaterSense released its initial draft specification for public comment. It was followed by a revised specification, released in January 2011. In the months since, EPA has carefully considered input from a wide variety of stakeholders with varying view points. This final specification represents a culmination of research, collaboration, and compromise that balances the needs and interests of WaterSense stakeholders.

The final specification sets performance criteria in terms of irrigation adequacy and irrigation excess. In addition, the specification includes supplemental capability requirements, which provide another level of performance to product users. The specification also informs stakeholders about testing configuration and labeling.

## **A Label with Integrity**

By using water-efficient products, consumers save natural resources, reduce water consumption, and save money. In order to realize these savings, consumers need to be able to identify products that not only use less water but also achieve the level of performance they expect. EPA created the WaterSense label to make it easy for consumers to find these water-efficient products and have confidence that they will perform to their needs.

To help consumers and contractors identify WaterSense labeled products, the WaterSense label is required to be printed on the product packaging of all labeled products. It may also be directly adhered to the product or used in manufacturer literature, advertising, and websites, as long as it is used directly in conjunction with the certified product. Only products independently certified to meet a WaterSense specification can bear the label and only an approved licensed certifying body can issue the label. Manufacturers can provide the label artwork to retailers, distributors, and wholesalers for promotional purposes, including fliers, in-store displays, and websites. Consumers and contractors can visit the WaterSense website ([www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense)) to see the current listing of all WaterSense labeled products.

## **WaterSense Partners Provide Support**

Certification programs for irrigation professionals were the first entities to earn the WaterSense label. Irrigation designers, installation/maintenance professionals, or auditors who are certified through a WaterSense labeled certification program are eligible to become a WaterSense irrigation partner. WaterSense has partnered with more than 1,100 irrigation professionals across the country who are committed to water efficiency and certified on their knowledge of water-efficient irrigation practices. In fact, many of these partners already incorporate weather-based irrigation controllers into their irrigation system designs.

The WaterSense label first appeared on products in 2007, with the release of the WaterSense Specification for Tank-Type Toilets. Since then, bathroom sink faucets, showerheads, and urinals have joined the ranks of WaterSense labeled products and are transforming the market for water-efficient plumbing. More than 4,000 different models of plumbing products have earned the WaterSense label to date, helping consumers save a cumulative 125 billion gallons of water and \$2 billion in water and energy bills.

Partnering with WaterSense demonstrates commitment to water efficiency and provides a way for companies to distinguish themselves from their competitors. WaterSense partners have access to free tools and resources to help promote the WaterSense labeled products they sell and have increased exposure by being listed as a WaterSense partner on the program website. In the five years since the program's inception WaterSense manufacturer partners have shipped more than 50 million products with the label.

The success of WaterSense in the plumbing industry has brought with it increasing consumer awareness and support from manufacturers across the industry. As Marie-Helene Pernin, Marketing Manager at NEOPERL, Inc. explains, "The label has brought a great awareness to water conservation at the consumer level." Plumbing manufacturer Caroma Industries, a 2010 WaterSense excellence award winner, has capitalized on that WaterSense brand recognition. The company estimates that 99 percent of its toilet sales in 2009 in the United States was WaterSense labeled models. With the release of the final WaterSense Specification for Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers, irrigation product manufacturers can now join this community of manufacturers who have benefitted from WaterSense brand recognition.

WaterSense also partners with retailers and distributors to promote WaterSense labeled products. Lowe's, a two-time WaterSense partner of the year, uses online training to educate its more than 238,000 employees on WaterSense messaging and encourages employees to try labeled products for themselves in order to integrate WaterSense throughout its stores. Lowe's and The Home Depot publicize WaterSense in national and local television spots, circulars, magazine ads, and online.

Speaking at the Annual Association of Home Appliance manufacturers meeting in 2008, John Kasberger, senior vice president and general merchandising manager for kitchen and bath at Lowe's, explained how the retailer works with vendors to get water-saving products on their shelves as soon as they earn the WaterSense label: "Lowe's is going to give WaterSense [labeled

product] suppliers preference when selecting new products and programs,” he said. “We want to be a leader when it comes to helping customers save water.”

Ferguson, one of the country's largest wholesale distributors of plumbing supplies, and a 2007 WaterSense partner of the year, has sold thousands of WaterSense labeled products to contractors, plumbers, builders, and a rising number of homeowners and remodelers. To help drive consumer traffic toward water-efficient fixtures, the company uses point of purchase displays and has made an effort to work with municipalities to stay abreast of rebate programs. Ferguson educated its staff of 22,000 associates in 1,400 service centers located in all 50 states about the benefits of water efficiency and WaterSense labeled products. To help educate local contractors, Ferguson hosts in-store events where contractors can view demonstrations of WaterSense labeled products and have their questions answered by Ferguson staff and manufacturer representatives.

WaterSense also partners with utilities, water districts, state and local governments, trade associations, and nonprofit organizations to promote water efficiency and the value of the WaterSense label. Many of these partners offer rebates or other promotions to encourage local consumers to buy WaterSense labeled products. In 2010 alone, WaterSense partners reported that they issued more than half a million incentives for water-efficient products.

“We are now basing our programs/rebates off of [WaterSense labeled] products,” said Lisa Brown, Water Conservation Administrator for the City of Roseville, California. “The more products certified... the more we can incentivize.”

WaterSense partner Cascade Water Alliance, a nonprofit organization of eight municipalities in the Puget Sound area in Washington, which provides water to 370,000 residents and 22,000 businesses, has implemented several water-efficiency programs including a toilet rebate program. Cascade offers \$100 rebates for residential or commercial customers who replace older, inefficient tank-type toilets with any WaterSense labeled toilet. In order to increase consumer awareness, Cascade met with local retailers and plumbers to train sales staff and provide free point-of-purchase promotional materials. Some retailers estimated that, thanks to Cascade’s rebate program, 75 to 90 percent of their toilet sales are now WaterSense labeled toilets. Additionally, 94 percent of customers surveyed by Cascade said their new toilets perform as well as or better than their previous models, affirming EPA’s performance criteria for WaterSense labeled products.

In addition to providing all of its partners with branded marketing tools to promote WaterSense labeled products, in 2010, WaterSense launched We’re for Water, a social marketing campaign to encourage consumers to make simple changes to save water. The We’re for Water campaign seeks to foster a community of organizations and individuals who care about saving water for future generations. The cornerstone of the campaign is a series of print public service announcements that encourage consumers to try WaterSense labeled products and practice other water-saving behaviors.

## **Certified Green Value**

With the introduction of the first WaterSense labeled irrigation product, EPA hopes to provide a significant step toward increasing water efficiency in the landscape irrigation sector. Third-party product certification backed by the credibility of EPA can transform an industry and create opportunities for new business. In the plumbing sector, for example, problems with first-generation “low flow” toilets were infamous in the early 1990s. Almost everyone remembers toilets that clogged and showers with no power. Although later generations of products resolved these issues, misconceptions persisted and kept many consumers from saving both water and money. WaterSense has been able to help the plumbing industry overcome the poor reputation of “low flow” products by including performance requirements in its specifications. Consumers know the WaterSense label signifies both efficiency and performance, taking the risk out of buying a water-saving product.

Product certification also offers the advantage of allowing WaterSense labeled products to be recognized by other green programs. The U.S. Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Green Globes’ Green Building Initiative, National Association of Home Builders’ National Green Building Standard, and International Code Council’s International Green Construction Code have all incorporated WaterSense labeled products in their green building standards. Some states and municipalities have also turned to WaterSense to green their local building codes. In Miami-Dade County, new construction is required to install water-efficient plumbing fixtures using the WaterSense specifications as a reference. Inclusion in these requirements has led to increased demand for WaterSense labeled products from builders and contractors.

## **A Bright Future for Labeled Irrigation Controllers**

WaterSense owes its success to the dedication and enthusiasm of the more than 2,000 utilities, government entities, nonprofit organizations, manufacturers, retailers, distributors, builders, and certified irrigation professionals who have partnered with WaterSense to help promote the WaterSense label and spread the word about the importance of water efficiency. With the release of the final WaterSense Specification for Weather-Based Irrigation Controllers, EPA is excited to have new opportunities work together to increase water-efficiency in the irrigation products industry.

For more information about WaterSense labeled weather-based irrigation controllers and partnership opportunities with WaterSense, please visit the WaterSense website at [www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense).

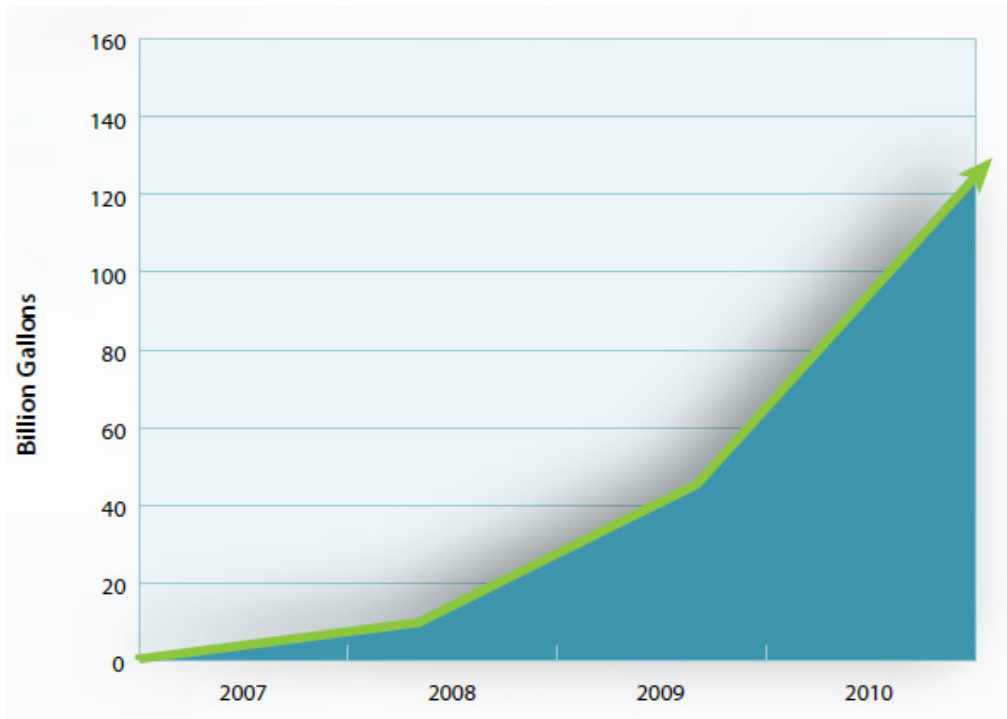


Figure 1. Cumulative water savings associated with WaterSense labeled products.

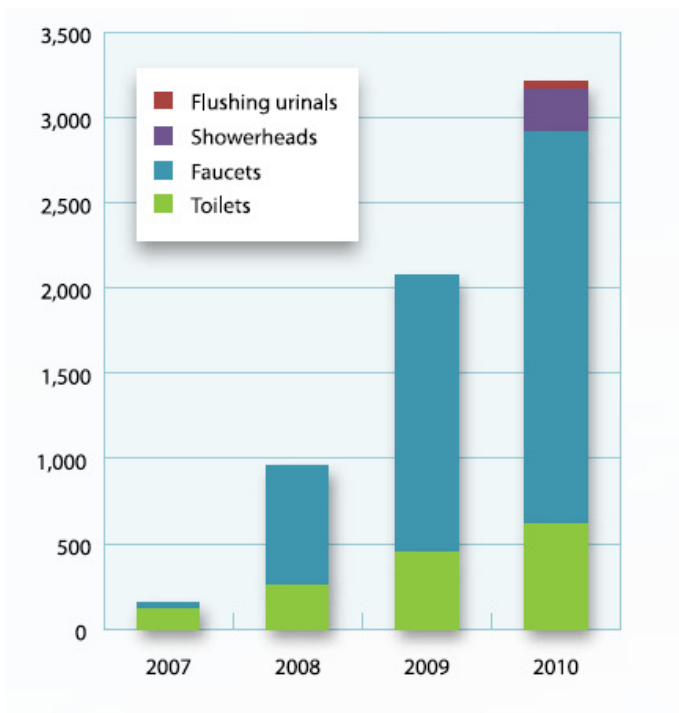


Figure 2. Total number of WaterSense labeled models (2007-2010).