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 has been growing. A U.S. Government Accountability Office survey of water managers across the country showed that at least 36 states were anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages by 2013, even under non-drought conditions.

How can water efficiency help local communities?

Water supply infrastructure is a major cost for most local markets across the United States. A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report estimates that wastewater utilities will need to invest $202.5 billion over the next 20 years to update their infrastructure; drinking water utilities will also need an estimated $276.8 billion by 2023. Water efficiency is a cost-effective way that local communities can help manage their infrastructure needs.

Which regions 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 tends 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. Droughts that plagued the Southeast in 2007 demonstrate the need for saving water. 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 all local markets around the country. Through this national program, local water utilities, product manufacturers, and retailers work with EPA to promote water-efficient products and practices among consumer and commercial audiences.

What is the goal of WaterSense?

EPA created WaterSense to provide consumers with a simple way to identify water-efficient products and services. The WaterSense label helps customers differentiate between products in the marketplace, while ensuring product performance and encouraging innovation in manufacturing.

How will EPA ensure that these products work as well as conventional models?

Performance criteria are a critical component to each WaterSense product specification developed. To earn the WaterSense label, products must undergo independent testing and certification by third-party laboratories to ensure they meet EPA performance and efficiency criteria.

What products are included in the WaterSense program?

WaterSense labels toilets, faucets, and faucet accessories that use less water but perform as well or better than standard models. 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 are water-efficient products labeled/recognized?

The WaterSense label differentiates products that meet EPA's criteria for efficiency and performance. This label appears on product packaging, on in-store displays, and in manufacturer literature and Web sites. Shoppers can also visit <www.epa.gov/watersense> to see a registry of labeled products.

How are specifications for products being determined?

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

What other benefits do WaterSense labeled products provide?

It takes a lot of energy to pump, treat, and supply water to your home. Using water efficiently not only saves energy, but reduces the greenhouse gas emissions associated with electricity generation. If just 10 percent of American homes remodeled with WaterSense labeled fixtures, we could save electricity and reduce emissions equal to removing 34,000 cars from the road for a year.

How is EPA coordinating with local water utilities?

Hundreds of water utilities have partnered with EPA to promote WaterSense and encourage consumers to look for the label. Many utilities already have efforts in place to increase the water efficiency of residential and commercial irrigation systems. Utilities are encouraged to partner with WaterSense and use the program as part of their local water-efficiency and conservation efforts.

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

You can reduce your water use by as much as 30 gallons per day by taking a few simple steps. 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, <www.epa.gov/watersense>, where you can also sign up for the *WaterSense Current* e-newsletter.