

## EPA Gives July 7 Deadline for Revised WaterSense Program

Monday, June 29, 2009, 6:00 p.m., EDT

Among those who met with the EPA to voice concerns with the original WaterSense home specification were Dave Jones (left) and Freddie Combas of International Professional Pond Contractors Association and Deborah Hamlin of Irrigation Association. With little fanfare, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in May posted a revised draft of its WaterSense single-family new home specification ([www.epa.gov/watersense/specs/homes.htm](http://www.epa.gov/watersense/specs/homes.htm)). EPA gave a July 7, 2009 deadline for public comments.

The specification is designed to allow home builders to qualify for the WaterSense label on new construction projects. The WaterSense label would alert prospective home buyers that the property is water-efficient (indoors and out) and uses about 20 percent less water than a comparable standard new home.

EPA reportedly heeded "hundreds of comments" regarding ornamental water features, which were banned in the original draft specification released in May 2008. Professional pond builders expressed concern that the ban, though limited to new homes seeking to participate in the WaterSense program, would brand water features as inherently water-wasteful. Another concern was that local jurisdictions would lift the WaterSense specification verbatim to apply to existing homes and local ordinances.

Under the revised specification, water features will be treated similarly to pools and spas. The WaterSense program will allow "the installation of ornamental water features that re-circulate water and serve as a beneficial use."

The WaterSense program defined ornamental water features as fountains, ponds, waterfalls, man-made streams and other decorative water-related constructions. Beneficial uses include habitat for wildlife, stormwater management and property cooling.

Water features also would be included within a 40 percent turfgrass allowance or as part of total landscapable area under a water budget allowance. The specification allows homebuilders to use one of two options for designing landscapes for WaterSense homes: 1. Limit total turfgrass to 40 percent of the landscapable area; 2. Allow for a water budget that is 70 percent of a comparable-sized lot landscaped entirely with turfgrass. Lots of 1,000 square feet or less of landscapable area are exempt from the outdoor criteria.

In other areas of the outdoor criteria, the EPA removed a clause requiring WaterSense irrigation partners to design and install irrigation systems on WaterSense homes. The EPA retained a requirement that those partners audit each irrigation system. Irrigation Association plans to advise the EPA that it does not support the revised outdoor specification, specifically the lack of scientific data to support some of the specification's language.

The EPA expects to review public comments through August, train home certification providers in September and October and release a final specification and a list of WaterSense licensed providers in November.