



Frequently Asked Questions

WaterSense® Labeled New Homes

Why label new homes?

Residential water use accounts for more than half of the publicly supplied water in the United States. With more than one million new homes now built each year in this country, EPA recognized a tremendous opportunity to promote water efficiency in the new housing sector while creating livable communities that help families save resources for the future.

How did EPA develop the *WaterSense Single-Family New Home Specification*?

WaterSense spent more than three years working with hundreds of builders, utilities, trade associations, manufacturers, landscape and irrigation professionals, and certification providers to develop efficiency and performance criteria for water-efficient new homes. EPA drafted two versions of the specification for public comment, developed a certification system, and conducted dozens of meetings with key stakeholders before it finalized the specification.

What is included in the specification?

In order to earn the label, homes must feature WaterSense labeled plumbing fixtures, efficient hot water delivery systems, and yards designed with water savings in mind. If they are included with the home, clothes washers and dishwashers must be ENERGY STAR® qualified models, and irrigation systems, if incorporated, must be designed or installed and audited by WaterSense irrigation partners.

How much will a WaterSense labeled new home save?

WaterSense labeled homes should save homeowners at least 10,000 gallons of water per year, enough to fill a backyard swimming pool. But the savings don't stop there. Because these homes also realize energy efficiency from heating less water, they save enough energy each year to power a television for four years. Combined, these savings help homeowners reduce their utility bills by at least \$100 to \$200 per year.

Does a WaterSense labeled new home cost more to build/own?

As is the case with other green building certification programs, EPA estimates some additional costs to builders to ensure their new homes meet the specification. With the utility savings homeowners realize from using less energy and water, any additional costs could pay for themselves in as little as six years.

What about the quality of WaterSense labeled new homes?

Just as products are required to be tested and certified by an independent third party before they can earn the WaterSense label, WaterSense labeled new homes must be inspected and certified by a licensed certification provider to ensure that they meet EPA's criteria for efficiency and performance. WaterSense labeled homes mean getting and doing more with less water, so you can expect all the comforts of a new home *and* save water.

Why did EPA include a landscaping requirement?

On average, American homes use 30 percent of their water outdoors, but that number can be as high as 50 to 70 percent in drier regions of the country. The front yards (and back, if installed by builders) of WaterSense labeled new homes will use less water while providing curb appeal and low maintenance. EPA offers two options for builders to meet the landscaping requirement: using a “water budget” tool to determine a mix of regionally-appropriate plantings based on the climate and watering requirements of the region, or a set percentage of turfgrass, which often receives more water than a mix of local, drought-tolerant plants.

Who can participate in the program?

Home builders and their trade associations can join as WaterSense partners and commit to building homes to the specification. Home efficiency raters can serve as inspectors, green building organizations can serve as program administrators, and certification organizations are approved to become EPA licensed certification providers.

How will homeowners know their homes have earned the WaterSense label?

Builder partners provide homeowners of WaterSense labeled new homes with a certificate signed and dated by the inspector and the licensed certification provider indicating that the home meets EPA’s criteria for efficiency and performance. Homeowners will also receive a manual from the builder that identifies all of the water-efficient features of the home, based on a template EPA provides to its builder partners.

How can I find a WaterSense builder partner?

Builders and licensed certification providers who partner with WaterSense are listed at www.epa.gov/watersense/meet_our_partners.

Why did EPA limit the size and type of homes that can earn the label? Are homes three stories high with an underground basement eligible?

EPA limited the size of homes eligible for the WaterSense label in order to be consistent with homes built to the International Residential Code. The “three stories” limit applies to above-grade stories, so a home with three stories above ground and one story below ground would be eligible.

What about existing homes?

While this specification is currently only for single-family new homes of three stories or less, WaterSense encourages consumers interested becoming more energy- and water-efficient to look for WaterSense labeled plumbing fixtures and other efficient appliances when renovating their homes. A complete water-efficiency makeover can save a home as much as \$170 per year in utility costs.