



Frequently Asked Questions

WaterSense® Product Certification and Labeling

General

Why does EPA require third-party certification?

EPA wants to ensure the WaterSense program's integrity and sustainability. EPA also wants to ensure consumer confidence in the products that bear the WaterSense label.

Licensed certifying bodies, independent of EPA and the product manufacturers, test products for both efficiency and performance, certify product conformance to WaterSense specifications, authorize use of the WaterSense label, and conduct periodic market surveillance. Third-party certification is the framework already established in the United States to independently verify that products in the marketplace meet specifications and standards.

Will certification apply to all product categories?

EPA will require all WaterSense labeled products to be certified by a licensed certifying body. EPA may, however, adjust the specific certification requirements as appropriate for individual product categories.

Are there licensed certifying bodies that can certify all products?

There are licensed certifying bodies that are currently accredited to certify a majority of the products for which EPA is interested in developing specifications. EPA anticipates that more licensed certifying bodies will obtain accreditation to certify products as additional WaterSense specifications are developed.

How can stakeholders provide input on the specification development and certification processes?

EPA is interested in input from all stakeholders in the specification development and certification processes. EPA has established a list to notify interested persons when various programmatic elements are developed and released for public input. Please visit the Contact Us page to be added to the WaterSense e-mail and mailing list; remember to specify your interest in becoming part of the specification and certification development processes in the "Message" field.

How does EPA maintain the integrity of the WaterSense label?

EPA maintains the integrity of the WaterSense label through several mechanisms:

- Through the independent third-party certification process, licensed product certifying bodies provide surveillance for the proper use of the WaterSense label for the products that they certify—typically through periodic store audits or warehouse inspections.
- WaterSense encourages its partners to be vigilant and report any suspected label misuse to EPA. If you see a product you believe to be improperly labeled, please contact the WaterSense Helpline at (866) WTR-SENS (987-7367), or e-mail us.
- WaterSense encourages partners to submit print and Web materials for pre-press review. EPA provides prompt review and ensures that the use of the label is consistent with WaterSense guidelines.

- WaterSense conducts periodic reviews of partner Web sites to ensure that the label is used properly.
- WaterSense conducts periodic Google image searches to detect misuse of the label by non-partners. When label misuse occurs by a WaterSense partner, EPA contacts the relevant licensed certifying body, which handles necessary corrective actions. If a non-partner misuses the label, EPA engages in corrective action directly with the infringing party. In all instances, EPA strives to resolve matters quickly and fairly in order to preserve public confidence in the WaterSense program.

Manufacturers

How can my product earn the WaterSense label?

The first step toward obtaining the WaterSense label is for the product manufacturer to enter into a WaterSense partnership agreement with EPA. Manufacturers can sign a WaterSense partnership agreement with EPA once a draft specification has been released for a product they produce or manufacture under a private label. Under the partnership agreement, manufacturers will have 12 months to obtain certification for a product that conforms to the relevant WaterSense specification.

The second step is to have one of EPA's licensed certifying bodies certify your product for conformance to the relevant WaterSense specification. Manufacturers apply directly to the licensed certifying body for certification. Once your product is certified, the licensed certifying body will provide you with artwork for the WaterSense label, including the name of the licensed certifying body. You must use this label in accordance with the WaterSense label use guidelines.

Which certifying bodies can certify my products?

A listing of EPA licensed certifying bodies is posted on the WaterSense Web site or may be obtained from the WaterSense Helpline at (866) WTR-SENS (987-7367). Certifying bodies are approved for each

individual specification, so be sure to choose one that is licensed to the WaterSense specification relevant to your products. Products may be certified by any licensed certifying body listed for the relevant WaterSense specification.

What is generally involved in product certification?

Product certification involves product testing and an assessment of the production process and quality management system, both initially and on an ongoing basis. This may include factory visits, periodic product retesting, or other approaches to monitor the product's continued conformance to WaterSense specification requirements.

The general certification requirements applicable to all product categories are described in the WaterSense product certification system. EPA will evaluate and specify additional certification details for each new product category as part of the product specification development process.

How will consumers know that my product has been certified?

Only products certified to WaterSense specifications are allowed to bear the WaterSense label. In addition, EPA maintains a Web registry of WaterSense labeled products. To get your products included on this list you must submit to EPA a new certified product notification form for toilets or for bathroom sink faucets for each certified model. EPA will verify the product certification information with the licensed certifying body that conducted the certification. This process, from notification to listing on the WaterSense Web site, may take up to two weeks.

What is the cost of certification to product manufacturers?

The cost structure for product certification is determined by the licensed certifying bodies. EPA anticipates that the testing fee and cost for certification of products, which may include opening a new certification file or adding models to an existing file,

will be in line with the current cost structure to have plumbing products certified by an accredited certifying body.

How will this certification process impact smaller manufacturers of products?

In the development of its product certification system, EPA considered the impact on smaller manufacturers and worked to balance the cost and burden of the process with the rigor the program needs to maintain the WaterSense label's integrity.

While there will be some cost impact on all manufacturers to submit a product for certification, the strength of the WaterSense label should help products stand out in the marketplace. This should be of particular value to small business partners.

How long will the process take from the time I submit my product for certification until the time when I can apply the WaterSense label to products?

The exact process and timing will be determined by the licensed certifying body conducting the certification. Licensed certifying bodies recognize that time to market is an important consideration and will compete for a manufacturer's business in this area. EPA anticipates that the time to achieve product certification to WaterSense specifications will be similar to the time it currently takes to get plumbing products certified to American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) and other relevant standards.

I am an overseas manufacturer looking to get my products certified to WaterSense specifications. Will there be certifying bodies in my country that can conduct the certification?

WaterSense anticipates that at least some of its licensed certifying bodies will have offices worldwide

with the capability to conduct product certifications for WaterSense. Please keep in mind, however, that to be eligible for the WaterSense label, you must sell or intend to sell products in the United States that meet the relevant WaterSense specification within one year of partnership with EPA. Please contact one or more of EPA's licensed certifying bodies to determine if they certify products in your area.

WaterSense Product Certification System

What is the product certification system and how is it different than the interim certification process?

Under the interim certification process, EPA relied on current American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited certifying bodies to certify products in accordance with their existing certification schemes. Now, under the WaterSense product certification system, EPA has specified the minimum requirements that licensed certifying bodies must follow when certifying products for WaterSense. In addition, an EPA-approved accreditation body accredits certifying bodies specifically for their capability and competence to meet these requirements. The WaterSense product certification system enables EPA to:

- Ensure consistent application of its minimum product certification requirements.
- Establish uniformity in the certifying body accreditation process, while making the process open to all qualified accreditation organizations.
- Provide fully transparent criteria for product certification and the accreditation of product certifying bodies.

How does this new product certification system affect manufacturers whose products are currently in the draft or notice of intent stage of specification development?

As new final specifications are developed for WaterSense, the certification and labeling process will

occur in accordance with the final WaterSense product certification system. WaterSense will work with potential certifying bodies and accreditation bodies in advance of the release of any new final specification to ensure that there are licensed certifying bodies available to certify applicable products.

My organization certifies products. How can I become a licensed certifying body for WaterSense?

The first step toward becoming a licensed certifying body is to seek accreditation from an EPA-approved accreditation body in accordance with the final WaterSense product certification system for one or more of the WaterSense product specifications. Upon accreditation, please contact the WaterSense Helpline for application procedures and to obtain a copy of the licensing agreement for product certifying bodies.

My organization tests products. How can I participate in the WaterSense product certification process?

WaterSense licenses product certifying bodies, not individual testing facilities or laboratories. Certifying bodies certify products in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65, *General requirements for bodies operating product certification systems*, which includes product testing and conducting ongoing surveillance of product conformity. If your organization tests products in accordance with ISO/IEC 17025, *General requirements for the competence of calibration and testing laboratories*, a licensed certifying body may subcontract testing services to you as part of the product certification process. EPA is not involved in this subcontracting arrangement it must be made between the licensed certifying body and laboratory testing facility.

Under this new certification system, is my irrigation program eligible for certification?

The WaterSense product certification system applies only to the procedures and requirements for product certification. It does not apply to or address programs

for the certification of irrigation programs or professionals. Information related to professional certification programs may be found on the WaterSense Web site under Landscape Irrigation Services.

Under this new certification system, is my product eligible for certification and the WaterSense label?

This certification system does not impact which products are eligible for the WaterSense label; this is dictated by the release of final WaterSense product specifications for a particular product or product category. Specifications are developed after careful evaluation of technical and market factors that influence the viability of the WaterSense label for the product. For more information on the specification development process, please visit the Specification Development Process page on the WaterSense Web site. To view the product specifications that the program has released and those product categories that are currently eligible for certification and the WaterSense label, please visit the compendium of WaterSense product specifications.

What kind of accreditation are you offering and how can I get it?

EPA does not offer accreditation. EPA does require its third-party licensed certifying bodies to be accredited to the Water Sense certification system. In order to be eligible for accreditation, your organization must be a product certifying body that meets the minimum requirements as outlined in the WaterSense product certification system. These requirements include operation in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 65 and International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Guidance on the Application of (ISO/IEC) Guide 65 and the capability and competence to certify products in accordance with one or more of the individual WaterSense product specifications. If your organization meets these minimum requirements, please contact the WaterSense Helpline for application procedures and to obtain a copy of the licensing agreement for product certifying bodies.