

IRRIGATION

In the know: Irrigation Show 2012

Contractors should take note of potential WaterSense program changes, state affairs updates and innovative new products.

By MARISA PALMIERI

At the 2012 Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Orlando last month, more than 4,200 contractors, distributors and suppliers convened to learn about best practices and new products. For landscape and irrigation contractors, there are a few government affairs updates to note, reports John Farner, government affairs director for the Irrigation Association (IA), and Chad Forcey, IA's state affairs director.

PROPOSED WATERSENSE CHANGES

In October, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice of intent to revamp its WaterSense program specifications for irrigation certification programs. Currently, irrigation professionals can apply to become individual WaterSense partners when they're certified through a WaterSense-labeled certification program, such as the IA's certification program.

WaterSense is considering removing the individual partnership designation and expanding the partnership benefits to all professionals certified by WaterSense-labeled pro-

grams. Along with that change, the term "WaterSense irrigation partner" and its logo would be phased out; professionals would instead promote themselves as "certified by a WaterSense-labeled program" and use an "Ask About" WaterSense promotional label, according to presentation by Amber Lefstead, a WaterSense representative.

Why the changes? One of the main drivers was the need to improve the coverage of partners for other WaterSense programs. For example, the WaterSense for New Homes program requires irrigation systems be designed, installed and audited by WaterSense irrigation partners. Even though the program currently has more than 1,300 partners nationwide, it can be difficult to meet the New Homes program's demand, considering there are 20 states with 10 or fewer partners.

After gathering stakeholder feedback, WaterSense will draft a document for public comment in spring 2013. Implementation of the new structure is expected in 2014.

STATE AFFAIRS

This year there have been several waves made regarding irrigation professionals' "scope of practice," Farner says.

Illinois is facing the expiration of its irrigation contractor licensing law. If the law is allowed to expire, all irrigation contractors in the state will have to become licensed plumbers, which poses many costs and challenges for members. The IA is committed to preventing this from happening, Forcey says, and the association is working with irrigation professionals in Illinois to have the licensing law renewed through the general assembly.

In Oregon, the state landscape architect board earlier this

year said irrigation design could be performed only by licensed landscape architects. In April the IA sent a letter to the board, requesting clarification of the scope of practice rules related to irrigation design under the state's landscape architect law. The board responded in August, indicating it was backing away from its position, and noting that irrigation design could continue to be practiced by irrigation designers.



INNOVATION HONORED

The Irrigation Association named the winners of the 2012 New Product Contest at the annual Irrigation Show and Education Conference in Orlando on Nov. 5. The awards highlight exhibitor entries based on a wide range of criteria, including innovative and/or changed-for-the-better qualities, increased irrigation efficiency, ease of use, cost benefits, time savings and design quality.

Turf/Landscape Category

Winner: The Toro Co. Precision Soil Sensor

Honorable Mention: ETwater SmartWorks Rain Bird 50-Pin Replacement Panel

People's Choice Winner: LASCO Fittings Push Fittings

Specialty Category

Winner and People's Choice Winner: Hunter Industries/FX Luminaire Luxor ZD LED lighting controller

Honorable Mention: Fountain Bleu Water-Vac Solids Separation System pond cleaner