Sprinkler standard in the pipeline

Irrigation professional Tim Malooly shares the latest efforts to implement the first U.S. landscape irrigation sprinkler standard.

By JONATHAN KATZ

Water districts and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), most notably through its WaterSense program, have pressured the irrigation industry to use water more efficiently. Some contractors are taking notice and action; the Irrigation Association has ramped up education, promotions and advocacy; and landscape irrigation manufacturers have responded by advancing controller technology and introducing more water-efficient sprinklers.

Still, the industry doesn’t have consistent testing methods to identify and document component performance. In 2011, the International Code Council (ICC) and the Association of Agricultural & Biological Engineers formed a subcommittee to develop the first consensus standard for landscape irrigation sprinklers.

The subcommittee includes representatives from irrigation component manufacturers, water utilities, designers, installers and consumers.

_Landscape Management_ recently spoke with the irrigation committee Chair Tim Malooly, CIC, CID, CLIA, president of Minneapolis-based Water in Motion, about the status of the standard and how it will affect contractors.

Q: What type of standard is the ICC subcommittee developing?
A: This applies to landscape irrigation sprinklers, including pop-up broadcast sprinklers, pop-up misting or spray sprinklers and drip and micro components. One of the first things we’ve focused on is testing sprinkler performance. Right now, manufacturers test their products in their own facilities with their own methods and without independent verification.

The standards also give agencies—such as local units of government or the EPA—reliable, credible information from which to build a labeling program for products.

Q: What is the status of the standard right now?
A: The first public comment period took place in late winter of 2013. We’re currently in the process of considering every comment and making adjustments to the draft document.

My hope was to have the standard in place by the end of this year. It’s a little unknown whether we’re going to hit that target because a second comment period is expected to take place in August or September. Depending on how many comments we have, we may have to go to a third public comment period. However, if we don’t have to go through that, I think it’s realistic to expect the standard to be completed by March 2014.

Q: What type of feedback have you received so far?
A: There have been comments on testing methods, parameters and how we’re defining things. For example, the industry commonly refers to the application rate of an irrigation sprinkler as the “precipitation rate.” But after much deliberation, the committee chose to adopt the term “application rate” instead because the term “precipitation rate” connotes something other than mechanical irrigation taking place.

Q: What will this standard ultimately mean for landscape and irrigation contractors?
A: It’s important to the industry because the use of water in the landscape is currently receiving and will continue to receive a high level of scrutiny. People are questioning whether the water being...
used in the landscape is being used wisely
and responsibly. And the definition of
“responsibly” is changing. Currently
the definition of responsibly by some
includes emotional decision making or
social engineering positions. With the
creation of industry standards—and
codes that likely follow—responsible
water use moves away from emotion and
toward process and verifiable science.

Now more than ever practitioners
must adapt to changes occurring around
them and become as technically adept as
possible. The industry is changing, and
the world around the industry is demand-
ing more discipline, efficiency and rigor.
If practitioners choose to do things the
way they’ve always done them, they will
ultimately be left out.

Q
What are you referring to when you
talk about adapting to change?

A
Right now landscape sprinkler
components are so reliable that an
individual doesn’t have to know a lot
of the details of why a sprinkler system
works. As a result, many irrigation sys-
tems are being installed indiscriminately
and outside of best practices without
consideration for water efficiency. In
other words, many poor-quality lawn
sprinkler systems are being installed
with accompanying poor-quality main-
tenance and scheduling practices.

We’re using a resource that’s been
identified as being more precious than it
was in the past, and the Green Industry
has been identified as one of the big-
gest users. There’s a science behind the
design, installation and scheduling of
irrigation systems. If the industry doesn’t
take more seriously selection, design,
installation, maintenance and scheduling
practices, we run the risk of being put
out of business.

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