

# **EPA STEPS UP TO THE PLATE**

## **(Supporting Water Efficient Irrigation)**

by Gene Reagan

What is the most common complaint heard from Texas irrigators (besides the need for more enforcement)? Answer: “I can’t compete against cheap and inefficient irrigation systems.”

On March 3, a group of irrigation professionals met in Denver, Colorado in the offices of the Environmental Protection Agency to review and discuss that agency’s proposed Water Efficiency Program. The program is designed to, in part, “promote water efficiency and enhance the market for water-efficient products and services.” This is a bold effort by the EPA to help address the critical water shortages that will be faced throughout the country. They recognize that outdoor watering uses significant amounts of water and this usage must be reduced if we are to continue to enjoy our beautiful landscapes. There are two components to this program that will affect irrigators:

- 1) Irrigation Product Labeling
- 2) Certification Recognition of Irrigation Professionals

### **Irrigation Product Labeling**

You are probably familiar with the “Energy Star” program that identifies and labels products that are energy efficient, such as air conditioners, refrigerators, freezers, and other appliances. Irrigation product labeling will, through the use of third party, independent testing facilities identify and label specific irrigation products that have been proven to increase water efficiency. Possible candidates for this label are controllers, soil moisture sensors, etc. The “label name” has not yet been determined as of this writing. “Water Star” has been suggested, but appears to be unacceptable because of a perceived conflict with the Energy Star label.

### **Certification Recognition of Irrigation Professionals**

Currently, EPA is establishing criteria to recognize certification programs for irrigation professionals in three areas: system design; installation and maintenance; and system auditing. Approved programs will be able to issue EPA recognized certifications to irrigation professionals who qualify. Example: XYZ Association, after meeting EPA approval criteria, can become an official provider of EPA recognized certifications. The stated goal is to promote water efficient irrigation and enhance the market for dedicated professionals.

**What does this mean to the average irrigation professional?**

The EPA recognition will increase the market share for certified irrigation professionals and promote more efficient irrigation system design, installation and maintenance. To ensure success of their program, the EPA will reach out to: the irrigation industry; consumers; and local water utilities. The idea is to make everyone aware of the fragility of our water resources and introduce them to true professionals who are dedicated to quality and efficiency.

Irrigators who have been fighting the battle of trying to compete with contractors who cut corners and install inefficient systems will have the Environmental Protection Agency on their side. The irrigator who wants to succeed by installing quality, efficient irrigation systems may finally be able to rise up out of the pit of mediocrity, and proudly display their EPA recognized certification.

The EPA Water Efficiency Program is not going to succeed without the help and cooperation of irrigators. If we really want to see a higher level of quality and professionalism, this is our opportunity. Join the HGCI in supporting this effort.