

ALICIA MARRS

WaterSense award winners showcase the way to water savings

Although results are still being calculated for 2009, the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has announced that consumers have already saved 9.3 bil gal of water, thanks to WaterSense®-labeled plumbing fixtures shipped in 2008, the first full year of labeling water-saving products that meet both USEPA efficiency and performance criteria. In addition to significant water savings, these products helped achieve a corresponding energy reduction of more than 1 bil kW·h and avoided greenhouse gas emissions of more than 700,000 metric tons.

These are impressive results, but USEPA didn't achieve them alone. WaterSense counts on its utility, community, manufacturer, retail, distributor, irrigation, and other partners to educate consumers about WaterSense-labeled products and water-efficient practices. Through WaterSense, USEPA has tapped into the ingenuity of the manufacturing sector and galvanized water utilities, retailers, distributors, and irrigation professionals to educate the public on the need for water efficiency. Even among this cohort, some partners stand out as ambassadors in their respective sectors for their commitment and collaboration to further the WaterSense mission.

Starting in October 2008, USEPA began honoring partners in four categories for their outstanding achievements in increasing awareness of the WaterSense program and their demonstrated overall excellence in water efficiency (see the sidebar on page 62). In 2009, USEPA named the following entities WaterSense Partners of the Year:

- Cobb County Water System, Marietta, Ga., and James City Service Authority, Williamsburg, Va. (promotional partners);
- Kohler Co., Kohler, Wis. (manufacturer partner);
- Lowe's Companies Inc., Wilkesboro, N.C. (retail/distributor partner); and
- Brian Vinchesi, president of Irrigation Consulting Inc., Pepperell, Mass. (irrigation partner).

"The hard work and collaboration of more than 1,000 WaterSense partners have allowed the program to achieve significant progress in a few short years," said James Hanlon, director of USEPA's Office of Wastewater Management, at the inaugural WaterSense Awards Banquet cosponsored by the Alliance for Water Efficiency and held in conjunction with the WaterSmart Innovations Conference in Las Vegas, Nev., last October. "But the 2009 Partners of the Year went above and beyond the call of duty in building public awareness of the WaterSense label and the need for water efficiency."

PARTNERS OF THE YEAR EXEMPLIFY COMMITMENT AND LEADERSHIP

For the Cobb County Water System, joining WaterSense made perfect sense. As one of the largest counties in the metropolitan Atlanta, Ga., area, Cobb County depends almost exclusively on surface water from the Chattahoochee River and Allatoona Lake. Water rights issues and a limited water supply pushed the need for water efficiency to the forefront of the news headlines in the county. WaterSense has been its main tool for promoting water-saving practices.

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FOSTERING AWARENESS
OF WATER CONSERVATION
AND LEADING THE CHARGE
AGAINST WATER WASTE
ARE ALL IN A DAY'S WORK
FOR THE WATERSENSE
PARTNERS OF THE YEAR.

What Makes a Winner?

Potential partners often ask, "What does it take to be a WaterSense Partner of the Year?" The US Environmental Protection Agency recognizes those exceptional partners who

- help advance the overall mission of the WaterSense program,
- increase awareness of the WaterSense brand in a measurable way, and
- demonstrate overall excellence in the water-efficiency arena.

Partner of the Year awards are based on activities that increase awareness of water efficiency and WaterSense-labeled products, but preference is given to partners who work together to achieve results. Applicants should be sure to include measurable results, including the number of people reached with messages, product incentives given, increases in sales, and water saved as a result of technical, educational, or promotional efforts. Applications for the 2010 Partner of the Year awards are due by April 2010. For more information, please visit www.epa.gov/watersense/awards.

"WaterSense is easy and consistent for our consumers," reported Kathy Nguyen, Cobb County senior project manager. "They look for the WaterSense label, and they know they are doing something positive to save this essential resource."

To stimulate consumer involvement in water efficiency, the county initiated a program to offer \$100 rebates on WaterSense-labeled toilets. Since the rebate program's inception, more than 1,650 rebates have been issued for toilets bearing the WaterSense label. According to Nguyen, "Consumers want to do the right thing and not waste water, but they think it's difficult, or they just don't know where to start. When you can empower them with an easy option to start, that gets them excited, and they want to go to the next step."

By collaborating with Kohler, Lowe's, The Home Depot, plumb-

ing distributor Ferguson's, and other local partners, Cobb County helped to orchestrate and promote Georgia's statewide sales-tax holiday for WaterSense-labeled products in October 2008. The results speak for themselves: the county saw a 400% increase in purchases of WaterSense-labeled toilets over any similar time frame.

To convince plumbing professionals to promote water efficiency, Cobb County partnered with Atlanta and Fulton counties to sponsor classes offered by GreenPlumbers USA, a training program promoting the benefits of water conservation. (See the article on page 67.) More than 140 Georgia plumbers attended the classes where county representatives highlighted WaterSense in their presentations at every workshop.

James City Service Authority proves that even a small fish can make a big splash. One municipal utility showed you don't have to be big to save big. Serving more than 46,000 people in one of the fastest growing localities in Virginia, the James City Service Authority (JCSA) is the only utility in the Hampton Roads region offering a comprehensive rebate program as part of its efforts to protect limited groundwater resources. The utility offers rebates for WaterSense-labeled toilets, rain sensors, rain barrels, on-demand hot water recirculators, WaterSense irrigation partner services, and more.

Recognizing that thirsty lawns and landscaping were draining the groundwater supply during peak summer months, the JCSA established a local Let's Be Water Smart program to educate customers on how to practice water efficiency outside. A total of 35 builders, developers, contractors, irrigation specialists, landscape designers, and landscapers collaborated with the utility to spread the word about WaterSense to customers and local professionals. In addition, the utility created the WaterLine Newsletter, a bill stuffer mailed to 18,000 households, to inform homeowners about WaterSense irrigation partners, the Irrigation Association's

Smart Irrigation Month, and summer outdoor water use regulations.

To help residents save water and save a little "green" indoors, the JCSA also took the initiative to work with the professionals who actually bring water-efficient products to its customers' doors. By partnering with a local citizens' group, the utility has encouraged plumbers and retailers to provide discounts on WaterSense-labeled toilets and installation of the fixtures.

Kohler takes the show on the road.

Named WaterSense Manufacturing Partner of the Year for two years running, Kohler has shown that innovation in manufacturing, consumer education, and collaboration with WaterSense partners big and small can take an already strong commitment to water efficiency to even greater heights. "The importance of water efficiency resonates with Kohler on several levels. First, because everything about our products is about interacting with water," said Shane Judd, Kohler senior product manager of water conservation and commercial products. "We have a vested interest in protecting water. We also see from a global perspective the need for water conservation, and we have the ability to make an impact there."

By the end of 2008, Kohler had earned the WaterSense label for 40% of its bathroom faucets and 175 combinations of toilet components, and the company expected to dramatically increase that number over the coming years. In addition to expanding an extensive line of WaterSense-labeled products and promoting them in contractor trade shows across the country, Kohler increased its focus on consumer education. At 30 screenings of the IMAX film *Grand Canyon Adventure: River at Risk*, Kohler brought WaterSense-labeled products right to the theater for consumers to see.

Kohler's promotional activities spanned the nation at venues large and small. The company provided mobile restrooms equipped with WaterSense-labeled fixtures for a consumer event in Denver, Colo., as well as during the sales-tax holiday on

WaterSense-labeled products in Georgia and helped the Madison Water Utility launch Wisconsin's first toilet rebate program. As Judd pointed out, "Events like this, where we can partner with utilities and other stakeholders, allow the consumers to see these products in action compared with conventional models. They often say, 'Wow! I'm really wasting that much water every time I flush?'"

Lowe's companies make the sale.

On the forklift-stocked shelves of many home improvement stores, products are likely to be overlooked. At most stores, shoppers can walk right through the plumbing department without ever knowing that water savings are within arm's reach. Fortunately for water conservation efforts, Lowe's wasn't about to let this scenario play out in its stores.

With more than 1,650 retail locations promoting WaterSense through signage and education, Lowe's can reach more than 14 million customers each week. The Lowe's Efficient Home Guide, which was distributed to more than 200,000 people in 2008, explains the savings and benefits of WaterSense-labeled products. To sweeten the deal, Lowe's teamed up with manufacturers such as Kohler, American Standard, and Jacuzzi to provide discounts and promotions on products bearing the WaterSense label. Lowe's further promotes WaterSense-labeled products to its customers by training its sales associates about the program. An internal video channel and companywide marketing meetings give employees the knowledge, skills, and tools they need in order to educate customers about water efficiency and WaterSense-labeled products.

Speaking at the annual Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers meeting in 2008, John Kasberger, senior vice-president and general merchandising manager for kitchen and bath at Lowe's, explained how the retailer works with vendors to get water-saving products on their shelves as soon as they earn the WaterSense label.

"Lowe's is going to give WaterSense [-labeled product] suppliers preference when selecting new products and programs," he said. "We want to be a leader when it comes to helping customers save water."

Vinchesi spreads the word about WaterSense and water efficiency.

In addition to the many professional organization partners that have helped WaterSense make great strides through their commitment and collaboration, USEPA also works with hundreds of certified irrigation professionals to improve the efficiency of landscape watering. Brian Vinchesi, the 2009 WaterSense Irrigation Partner of the Year, is a 25-year industry veteran who has completed four WaterSense-labeled certification programs.

Vinchesi's company, Irrigation Consulting Inc., has offices in Massachusetts and North Carolina. In addition to his own credentials, Vinchesi requires his employees to complete at least one WaterSense-labeled certification program, increasing the company's expertise and offerings in water-efficient irrigation systems.

To promote efficient landscape irrigation across the country in 2008, Vinchesi taught more than 10 courses in irrigation auditing, gave guest lectures, wrote articles for the magazines *Mountain West Turf* and *Irrigation & Green Industry*, and worked on several irrigation manuals and course guides. In addition, he keeps informed about the latest water-saving irrigation techniques and technologies, working with the Irrigation Association's Smart Water Application Technology initiative to help develop testing protocols to measure the performance of weather-based irrigation controllers and soil-moisture sensors, in preparation for a WaterSense labeling specifications for these products.

"I've made it my goal to immerse myself in the irrigation field," Vinchesi said. "Seeing how much irrigation practices, awareness, and technology have changed over the past 10 years has made keeping up-to-date in this field vital to success."

USEPA AND WATERSENSE PARTNERS MAKE A WINNING COMBINATION

From collaboration to education, it's clear why USEPA recognized its 2009 WaterSense Partners of the Year. In addition to these outstanding contributors, more than 1,000 other organizations and individuals have played a part in ensuring the program's success. "Our partners have demonstrated how collaboration and commitment to water efficiency can result in major savings for the consumer," noted Peter S. Silva, assistant administrator for USEPA's Office of Water. "By working together to promote WaterSense-labeled products and other water-efficient behaviors, they helped Americans save water, energy, and money on their utility bills."

USEPA encourages utilities to become WaterSense partners so that they can join a national water-efficiency campaign and gain access to a network of water purveyors and retailers, distributors, and manufacturers of water-efficient products. WaterSense and its partners offer consumers simple ways to identify water-saving products and practices and encourage positive actions everyone can take to reduce their water use.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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