Notice of Intent (NOI) to Revise the Requirements and Certification of WaterSense Labeled Homes

I. Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) WaterSense® program released the first version of its *Final Specification for New Homes* in 2009.[1] EPA has since issued two modifications based on updates to the WaterSense program, lessons learned from the building industry, and additional feedback from stakeholders. In 2012, EPA broadened the scope to enable homes in multifamily buildings to earn the label with Version 1.1,[2] while also updating product and landscape requirements. In 2014, EPA published Version 1.2 to reflect changes in the relationship between WaterSense and irrigation professionals, which had the impact of expanding the pool of eligible irrigation professionals who can design, install, and audit the irrigation system for homes pursuing the WaterSense label.[3]

The intent of the WaterSense labeled homes program is to encourage the construction and purchase of water-efficient, high performing homes that make use of efficient products and advanced design. Further, the program incorporates audits and inspections to validate that construction aligns with the intended efficient design. As summarized in Table 1, the WaterSense specification achieves this by requiring: WaterSense labeled products; other water-efficient appliances; sound design strategies in building systems (e.g., hot water distribution and delivery, irrigation); and the use of trained professionals throughout design and construction (e.g., inspection and certification process, professional requirements for irrigation system design, installation, and audits). Through the WaterSense labeled homes program, EPA also aims to encourage communities to use water efficiently to help extend the life of water and wastewater infrastructure, serve as a value-added element for home builders and home buyers, and improve the brand recognition of the WaterSense label to further encourage the purchase of WaterSense labeled products and homes.

[1] *WaterSense Single-Family New Home Specification.* December 9, 2009. www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-02/documents/ws-specification-home-v1.0.pdf

[2] *Version 1.1 WaterSense New Home Specification*. Effective January 1, 2013. www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-02/documents/ws-specification-home-spec-v1.1.pdf

[3] *WaterSense New Home Specification,* Version 1.2. Effective July 24, 2014. www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-01/documents/ws-homes-spec.pdf

Table 1. Summary of EPA's Indoor and Outdoor Water Efficiency Criteria From *WaterSense New Home Specification,* Version 1.2

Indoor Criteria	Outdoor Criteria
Leaks • No visible leaks **Service Pressure** • Service pressure ≤ 60 psi **Hot Water Delivery** • 10-degree Fahrenheit temperature change observed within ≤ 0.6 gallons **Plumbing Fixtures** • WaterSense labeled toilets, bathroom sink faucets, and showerheads **Dishwashers and Clothes Washers*** • ENERGY STAR certified dishwasher and clothes washer	**Landscape Design** • Complies with WaterSense's Water Budget Tool for water-smart design **Irrigation System*** • WaterSense labeled irrigation controller • Designed or installed by an irrigation professional certified by a WaterSense labeled program • Audited by an irrigation professional certified by a WaterSense labeled program • Multifamily: Independently metered • Various technology restrictions and requirements **Pools and Spas*** • Single-family: Cover installed • Multifamily: Independently metered, gutter or grate system used, sorptive media (pre-coat) or cartridge filtration system installed

* If included with the home at time of purchase/inspection.

EPA estimates that a WaterSense labeled home can save a family of four up to 50,000 gallons of water and $600 per year when compared to a typical stock home. WaterSense labeled homes also reduce the amount of energy required to heat water, further reducing utility costs for the homeowner. Moreover, EPA has found that the WaterSense labeled homes program has resulted in benefits beyond just the homes that are certified. WaterSense offers tools associated with WaterSense labeled homes to builders as a resource on water-efficient product and design strategies. These resources have benefits and result in lower water use, even in cases where homes are not certified. WaterSense labeled homes have also proven to be a useful tool in EPA's coordination with other certification programs. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Zero Energy Ready Home (ZERH) program requires single-family homes to have hot water delivery systems that meet the efficiency requirements of the current *WaterSense New Home Specification.* The ZERH program incorporating this important link between water and energy use in their requirements further promotes WaterSense and water efficiency within the building industry.

EPA aims to maintain these benefits moving forward, but in the eight years since the original home specification's release, EPA has also observed several opportunities for improvement. Based on feedback from stakeholders, years of programmatic operation, and changes in the home building marketplace that have occurred over the last decade, EPA has decided to re-examine the specification and certification process for WaterSense labeled homes. The goal is to allow for more flexibility in the technical requirements, streamline the program requirements and certification, adapt to a changing home building market, encourage the adoption of emerging technologies and practices, and facilitate increased use of the specification.

By adding flexibility to the technical requirements, as well as to the program and certification structure, EPA seeks to increase the reach of the WaterSense homes program and make it possible for more homes to earn the WaterSense label, while maintaining an equal (or greater) level of water efficiency and performance. Additionally, changes to the certification process will make earning the WaterSense label less onerous for both EPA and the industry and can be done without compromising the certification process WaterSense employs to ensure labeled homes in fact meet the requirements. Implementing a streamlined program that encourages home builders and home buyers to build and select high-performing, water-efficient WaterSense labeled homes will help advance WaterSense's mission of promoting a nationwide ethic of water efficiency.

With this NOI, EPA seeks feedback on the existing *WaterSense New Home Specification*, Version 1.2. and *WaterSense New Home Certification System*, Version 1.2. EPA also seeks feedback on WaterSense's initial thoughts and potential approaches for revising the program, including the topics and discussion identified in the following sections.

II. Technical and Efficiency Requirements and Implementation Methodology

The existing specification establishes a set of indoor and outdoor technical requirements that must be included in the home design and verified by a trained inspector for the home to earn the WaterSense label. Builders have indicated that this approach does not provide enough flexibility, effectively precluding them from participating in the program. Specifically, some requirements may not have applicability in certain regions and/or may not be cost-effective. For example, outdoor water use may not be a focus in certain parts of the country, even though its impact on total water use in other parts of the country is well-established. If builders are unable to communicate the value of certain water-efficient features to homebuyers because those features do not have regional significance, builders are unlikely to pursue WaterSense certification in that region. Thus, industry professionals have indicated that a lack of flexibility inhibits the ability of builders to choose cost-effective, water-efficient technologies to differentiate their homes.

Wherever feasible, WaterSense specifications reference existing, voluntary, consensus-based national standards as the basis for the water efficiency and performance testing protocols, including standards that have been approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). In cases where a consensus-based standard does not exist or is deficient in meeting WaterSense's criteria for specification adoption, EPA works with standards organizations and industry stakeholders to develop the appropriate protocol for assessing water efficiency and performance. With this specification, EPA will strive to reference all or part of existing standards that address water efficiency for new homes.

WaterSense is considering alternative structures for the technical requirements of WaterSense labeled homes, outlined below, to instill more flexibility into the program, evaluate potential developments in water efficiency certification standards, and help achieve the program goals and benefits described in Section I. WaterSense recognizes that these options do not represent an exhaustive list and may not be mutually exclusive.

Points-Based Structure

Under a points-based structure, EPA would assign a pre-established number of points to certain project elements. The builder would have the flexibility to select among the elements to achieve

a total points threshold that is required for home certification. In some cases, certain critical elements may be identified as prerequisites to achieve certification. There are many existing national and regional home certification programs that implement this type of specification structure (see Appendix A for example home certification programs).

Under this structure, EPA would assign points to criteria that, when met, improve a home's water efficiency. Typically, the number of points assigned to a specific action item would reflect potential water savings and other environmental benefits. In some cases, however, EPA could assign higher point values to incentivize specific practices based on the difficulty associated with them or to encourage a specific practice. Incorporating this approach would allow EPA to encourage innovation and adoption of less common practices that are known to achieve greater water efficiency and home performance.

Pursuing the points-based specification approach would provide several benefits over the existing specification. First, this structure would provide home builders flexibility to better adapt home offerings that address regional differences, specific demands of local customers, and/or determine the most cost-effective and/or innovative methods to achieve the intended water efficiency. Because the point values would be tied to water savings, WaterSense labeled homes would still achieve the water efficiency that home buyers and program stakeholders have come to expect from the program.

While a points-based specification structure provides some benefits over the current prescriptive specification structure, there are a few considerations to take into account. Because builders would be able to choose the water-saving elements they include, it is unlikely that all WaterSense labeled homes would have consistent water efficiency features. While EPA would plan to link point values to water savings, this may prove to be more challenging in practice. Therefore, two homes that both achieve the WaterSense label could have differences in water efficiency performance. This would also make it difficult for EPA to estimate water savings for labeled homes.

Performance-Based Structure

A performance-based structure would use a modeling tool to establish predicted water consumption for a home. A common application of this approach is via a performance rating whereby a home's predicted water consumption is scored against a "standard" (or reference) home with similar characteristics (e.g., number of bedrooms, number of bathrooms, installed appliances). This is done by comparing the model's prediction for the home (in gallons per day [gpd] or gallons per year [gpy]) to a defined reference home's predicted consumption (also in gpd or gpy). By choosing products, technologies, and design strategies that have been shown to reduce water consumption, the predicted consumption for a home can be reduced relative to the reference home (which does not change). As a result, builders can demonstrate that a home is more efficient than its counterparts. Much like points-based ratings, performance ratings are commonly used in the building industry as a measure of energy efficiency.

A simplified example of establishing a performance rating is shown in the equation below:

$$\textit{Performance Rating} = \frac{\textit{Rated Home Daily Water Consumption}}{\textit{Reference Home Daily Water Consumption}} \textit{ x Reference Scale}$$

For example, when using a modeling tool to compare the water consumption of a home that uses WaterSense labeled plumbing fixtures (Rated Home) versus a home that uses standard plumbing fixtures (Reference Home), a performance rating reference scale from 1 to 100 could be used. The modeling tool might predict that under normal operating conditions, the Rated Home uses 60 gpd and the Reference Home uses 80 gpd.

Assumptions:
Rated Home Daily Water Consumption: 60 gpd
Reference Home Daily Water Consumption: 80 gpd
Reference Scale: 100

$$Performance\ Rating = \frac{60\ gpd}{80\ gpd}\ x\ 100 = 75$$

Therefore, comparing the Rated Home to the Reference Home results in a score of 75. This score signifies that the home that uses WaterSense labeled plumbing fixtures is 25 percent, or 20 gpd, more efficient than a home with standard plumbing fixtures.

Performance ratings are a relatively new tool for determining water efficiency. EPA is aware of two systems currently available or under development:

- The Water Efficiency Rating Score® (WERS), developed by the Green Builder® Coalition, in cooperation with Build Green New Mexico (BGNM), the Santa Fe Area Home Builders Association (SFAHBA), and members of the City of Santa Fe Water Conservation Committee (SFWCC).
- The HERS water efficiency rating index (HERSH2O), which is currently being developed by the Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET).

A performance-based certification would provide a flexible format that is already familiar to the building industry. Additionally, it would align more closely with the ENERGY STAR Certified Homes program, which frequently uses RESNET's Home Energy Rating System (HERS) as an efficiency measure. Providing consistency among the structures of these specifications and certification systems could make it easier for home builders and home energy raters to simultaneously build and inspect homes to both programs. Finally, this approach would allow builders to leverage EPA's suite of home certifications, including EPA's Indoor airPLUS certification program that aims to improve indoor air quality within new homes, which is also a priority for the agency.

Request for Feedback

- What criteria should WaterSense use for referenced standards or certification systems? Should WaterSense require or prioritize programs that are ANSI-approved?
- Do stakeholders prefer a points-based, performance-based, or hybrid (points-based and performance-based) specification structure for a new WaterSense specification for homes? Why (or, for options not chosen, why not)?
- Which specification structure would provide the most flexibility to builders while also ensuring that high levels of water efficiency and performance are met?
- Do stakeholders have other ideas (in addition to modifying the specification implementation methodology) to allow flexibility for home builders to meet the specification criteria and to streamline the certification process?

- WaterSense also requests feedback on which of these approaches would allow for the most streamlined certification process.
- To what extent has the current specification's lack of flexibility impacted regional adoption of the specification?

III. Other Considerations for Technical and Efficiency Requirements

There are many potential benefits available to the WaterSense homes program from the flexibility of the structures described above. However, WaterSense has identified additional considerations, as listed below, that will need to be addressed regardless of which structure is chosen.

Performance Requirements

In addition to representing water efficiency, the WaterSense label also stands for quality performance. As such, WaterSense recognizes that regardless of the approach taken to structure the technical requirements, it may be necessary to maintain a prescriptive checklist of prerequisites that a home must include to earn the WaterSense label. For example, WaterSense labeled plumbing products are independently certified for water efficiency and performance. So, in addition to being among the easiest and most effective ways of improving a home's water efficiency, requiring their installation will help ensure water savings and homeowner satisfaction. The specification might therefore still require the installation of WaterSense labeled plumbing products (which would contribute to an efficiency requirement as well) as a requirement for any labeled home.

Potential Need for a Prescriptive Path

While many stakeholders desire more flexibility in the technical requirements, others may prefer the simplicity a well-defined, prescriptive option. EPA's ENERGY STAR Certified Homes program set a precedent for maintaining a performance path and prescriptive path simultaneously, thereby giving builders options while ultimately achieving comparable levels of efficiency and performance.

Certification Tiers

Either of the options identified in Section II could be applied in a binary pass/fail method (as WaterSense currently does), or via a tiered structure that grants a basic certification to homes that meet minimum efficiency requirements and a higher status to homes that go beyond. While a tiered program could have benefits—such as recognizing the most efficient homes and encouraging emerging technologies—tiers could have the effect of diluting the brand or confusing the market. Neither the WaterSense product labeling system nor other comparable government programs (e.g., ENERGY STAR) make use of tiers; however, this is a common practice in other home certification programs (see Appendix A).

Certification of Multifamily Units

Currently, WaterSense allows for units in some multifamily buildings to earn the WaterSense label.[4] At this time, it is unclear how appropriate a points- or performance-based structure would

[4] Under the *WaterSense New Home Specification*, Version 1.2, residential units in multifamily buildings that are three stories or less in size OR residential units in multifamily buildings that have independent heating, cooling, and hot water systems separate from other units are eligible to earn the WaterSense label.

be for a multifamily setting and whether it would require additional sampling protocols. Additionally, WaterSense has specific concerns about applying a performance rating to a multifamily irrigation system and landscape. In October 2017, WaterSense, in collaboration with ENERGY STAR, released the EPA Water Score for multifamily buildings. The score is a 1 to 100 rating of how efficiently an existing multifamily building (of 20 units or more) uses water compared to similar properties nationwide. The EPA Water Score is only available for existing, occupied multifamily properties, as it requires at least 12 months of actual tracked water use. As such, it is likely that the EPA Water Score for multifamily buildings will have limited use for those seeking an "as built" certification.

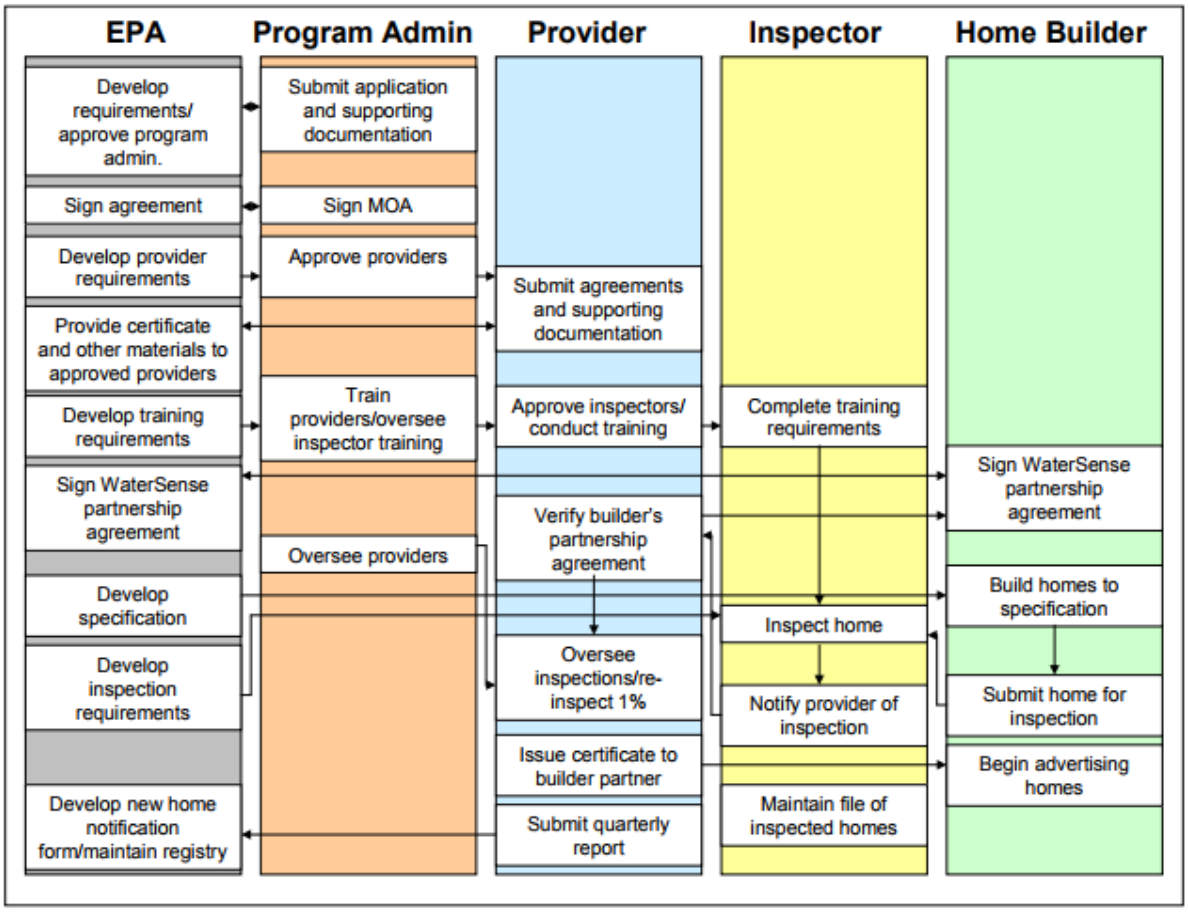
Request for Feedback

- Would either a points-based structure or performance rating adequately address performance issues, or should WaterSense include a supplemental set of requirements or a checklist in a specification?
- If WaterSense pursues a points-based or performance rating option, should a prescriptive specification option also be maintained?
- What are the potential benefits or considerations for incorporating a tiered certification system? Are there downsides?
- Are there any performance models currently available or in development that could assess a multifamily property's water efficiency performance at the design and construction stages?
- How important is it that WaterSense retain certification eligibility for units in multifamily buildings?

IV. Certification System and Requirements

The certification system for WaterSense labeled homes, which defines how homes are verified, professionals are trained, and quality assurance is conducted, is as important as the technical requirements in the specification itself. Some stakeholders have raised concerns about barriers within the certification system that impede participation of the inspector and rater community and limit coordination with other certification programs. Stakeholders have noted that elements of the inspection require a disproportionate amount of time relative to their impact on water-saving potential or add an unnecessary administrative burden that does not contribute to the homes' overall quality. Because barriers within the certification structure can prove just as difficult to overcome as technical criteria, EPA intends to reexamine the necessary elements of the *WaterSense New Home Certification System*, Version 1.2 to determine how it can be improved and streamlined. An overview of the current certification process is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. New Home Certification Process Under the *WaterSense New Home Certification System,* Version 1.2



Expanding Access Within the Existing Inspector/Rater Community

RESNET has served as the sole program administrator since the inception of the WaterSense homes program in 2009. However, many HERS rating providers and other RESNET community stakeholders have experienced challenges with WaterSense's inspection and certification requirements. For example, while a rater must complete training before being able to inspect a home attempting to earn the WaterSense label, the rater does not receive a certification or professional designation as a result of the training, making it less marketable. Further, many independent raters (those that contract with other companies to provide quality assurance) find it difficult to add WaterSense as a service if the program is not offered by their specific rating provider. Making WaterSense certification a more accessible and marketable tool to the entire RESNET stakeholder group could, in turn, result in more homes being certified as meeting the WaterSense specification, and therefore more available to home buyers.

Adding Flexibility for New and Existing Program Administrators/Verification Organization

The current certification system outlines specific roles for various participants in the certification process (as illustrated in Figure 1) with the intent of creating adequate quality assurance controls. WaterSense considers the independence of the certification/verification process a foundational philosophy of the program. WaterSense has received multiple inquiries from

organizations that wish to support the certification of homes. Just as added flexibility would have a benefit within the technical requirements without diluting the underlying goal of identifying high-performing, water-efficient homes, there may also be opportunities to add flexibility to the certification system while maintaining the independence of the certification/verification process. For example, could a robust quality assurance structure be implemented directly by a program administrator or other verification organization, rather than through an intermediary such as a provider as is the case in the current certification system (see Figure 1)?

EPA sees the incorporation of additional verification organizations into the WaterSense program as a way of expanding the program's reach. Additional verification organizations might take the form of other water efficiency programs (often local or regional) or of home certifications that address water efficiency along with other sustainable design and construction principles.

Request for Feedback

- How can WaterSense's inspection and certification process be more accommodating and streamlined?
- What is the importance of providing a professional identifier for raters?
- What would be appropriate requirements for quality assurance and how should they be implemented?
- WaterSense is seeking feedback from the administrators of other building certification programs on their interest in qualifying to issue the WaterSense label to homes.

V. Summary of Information Requests

WaterSense is requesting feedback on all aspects of this notice; summarized below are the specific outstanding issues, questions, and concerns about which WaterSense is seeking input prior to revising its specification for homes.

Technical and Efficiency Requirements and Implementation Methodology

- What criteria should WaterSense use for referenced standards or certification systems? Should WaterSense require or prioritize programs that are ANSI-approved?

- Do stakeholders prefer a points-based, performance-based, or hybrid (points-based and performance-based) specification structure for a new WaterSense specification for homes? Why (or, for options not chosen why not)?

- Which specification structure would provide the most flexibility to builders?

- Do stakeholders have other ideas (in addition to modifying the specification implementation methodology) to allow flexibility for home builders to meet the specification criteria and to streamline the certification process?

- WaterSense also requests feedback on which of these approaches would allow for the most streamlined certification process.

- To what extent has the current specification's lack of flexibility impacted regional adoption of the specification?

Other Considerations for Technical and Efficiency Requirements

- Would either a points-based structure or performance rating adequately address performance issues, or should WaterSense include a supplemental set of requirements or a checklist in a specification?
- If WaterSense pursues a points-based or performance rating option, should a prescriptive specification option also be maintained?
- What are the potential benefits or considerations for incorporating a tiered certification system?
- Are there any performance models currently available or in development that could assess a multifamily property's water efficiency performance at the design and construction stages?
- How important is it that WaterSense retain certification eligibility for units in multifamily buildings?

Certification System and Requirements

- How can WaterSense's inspection and certification process be more accommodating and streamlined?
- What is the importance of providing a professional identifier for raters.
- What would be the appropriate requirements for quality assurance how should they be implemented.
- WaterSense is seeking feedback from the administrators of other building certification programs on their interest in qualifying to issue the WaterSense label to homes.

VI. Schedule and Next Steps

WaterSense is requesting input, supporting information, and data from all interested parties on topics discussed in this NOI and otherwise related to the WaterSense homes program. Interested parties can provide input to WaterSense regarding any of the issues presented in this notice by submitting written comments to watersense-programs@erg.com. Comments and information on the issues presented in this NOI are welcome and will be taken into consideration as WaterSense develops the technical and certification requirements for Version 2.0.

In addition, WaterSense will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, March 14, 2018, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Eastern. WaterSense will discuss the information presented in this NOI and any stakeholder feedback received as part of the NOI review. Please register for the webinar for access information.

As WaterSense has done in the past, EPA will issue any Version 2.0 documents as draft and make them available for public comment prior to releasing final versions.

VII. References

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EPA, 2009. EPA Executive Summary. November 16, 2009. www.energystar.gov/ia/partners/bldrs_lenders_raters/downloads/EPA_Executive_Summary.pdf?3e30-fc2d

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WaterSense, 2014. *WaterSense New Home Specification*, Version 1.2. July 24, 2014. www.epa.gov/watersense/homes-specification

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WaterSense, 2017. Water Score for Multifamily Housing. www.epa.gov/watersense/water-score-multifamily-housing

Appendix A: Summary of Other Residential Certification Programs

Table A-1 provides a summary of other residential certification programs, both national and regional, that WaterSense considered during the development of this NOI. The table is not meant to be encompassing of all energy, water, or green construction related residential certification programs, but a sampling of some of the more prominent programs with which WaterSense has had experience. WaterSense welcomes feedback on programs not included in the table below that should be considered for insight or as a model for some aspect of a WaterSense labeled homes program.

Table A-1: Summary of Other Residential Certification Programs

Certification Program	Organization	Certification Territory	Implementation Methodology (e.g., Prescriptive; Points-Based; Performance-Based)	Tiered Rating	Website
ENERGY STAR Certified Homes	EPA	National	Prescriptive or performance-based	No	www.energystar.gov/newhomes
ENERGY STAR Multifamily High Rise Program	EPA	National	Prescriptive or performance-based	No	www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=bldrs_lenders_raters.nh_multifamily_highrise
Indoor airPLUS	EPA	National	Prescriptive	No	www.epa.gov/indoorairplus
Zero Energy Ready Home	DOE	National	Prerequisites plus performance-based	No	energy.gov/eere/buildings/zero-energy-ready-home
LEED for Homes	U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)	National	Prerequisites plus points-based	Yes	new.usgbc.org/cert-guide/homes
National Green Building Standard™ /ICC-700 (NGBS)[5]	Home Innovation Research Labs	National	Prerequisites plus points-based	Yes	www.homeinnovation.com/Green
Green Globes	Green Building Initiative	National	Prerequisites plus points-based	Yes	www.thegbi.org/green-globes-certification/

[5] American National Standards Institute (ANSI)-approved.

Certification Program	Organization	Certification Territory	Implementation Methodology (e.g., Prescriptive; Points-Based; Performance-Based)	Tiered Rating	Website
Home Energy Rating System (HERS) Index	RESNET	National	Performance rating	N/A	www.resnet.us/hers-index
$HERS_{H2O}$ Index	RESNET	National	Performance rating	N/A	www.resnet.us/professional/about/resnet_to_develop_water_efficiency_rating_system
Water Efficiency Rating System (WERS)	Green Builder Coalition/ Build Green New Mexico (BGNM)	National	Performance rating	N/A	www.wers.us/
Florida Water Star℠	St. Johns River Water Management District	Florida	Prescriptive (for Silver tier); prescriptive plus points-based (for Gold tier)	Yes	floridawaterstar.com/
Water Smart Home Program	Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA)	Southern Nevada	Points-based	No	www.snwa.com/biz/programs_home.html
EarthCraft™	Southface Energy Institute	Southeastern U.S.	Points-based	Yes	www.earthcraft.org/
GreenPoint Rated	Build It Green	California	Prerequisites plus points-based	Yes	www.builditgreen.org/greenpoint-rated
Built Green®	Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties	Washington	Prerequisites plus points-based	Yes	www.builtgreen.net/
Build Green New Mexico	Build Green New Mexico	New Mexico	Performance-based plus points-based	Yes	www.buildgreennm.com/