

Water Conservation

Background: PHCC's mission includes a specific directive stating the emphasis the association should have on "the protection of our environment and the health, safety and comfort of society." PHCC illustrates this commitment in a number of ways, including the promotion and advancement of proven water conservation methods. Because PHCC's plumbing contractor members play an integral role in the lives of Americans every day, they are in an ideal position to promote and assist in efforts to conserve water. With their daily contact with customers, licensed and qualified plumbing contractors can help individuals and businesses by maintaining existing systems or replacing outdated, low-efficiency plumbing fixtures. Plumbing contractors serve as the direct link to homeowners and building owners and can assist consumers in making informed decisions regarding the purchase of water-conserving products and services.

PHCC also is actively involved with several groups committed to water conservation research and methods. Because PHCC members are involved in the actual installation and maintenance of water devices and systems, they offer a direct experience perspective that is very helpful during discussions. PHCC's expertise also is considered very valuable among Washington lawmakers and regulators who are considering proposed legislation or regulations.

PHCC believes strongly that in order to achieve the ultimate goal of water conservation, new technologies aimed at specifically conserving water, such as water-efficient plumbing, wastewater management systems, wastewater recycling systems (greywater), and desalination technologies, must undergo a thorough process, including research, evaluation and testing. Introduction of new technologies into the marketplace must be based on sound science and a transparent process.

Beginning in the 1980's, California was the first state to enact legislation designed to mandate changes in flush volumes of water appliances – specifically toilets. California's actions resulted in the Energy Policy Act of 1992 (EPAAct) which required, among other things, for toilets installed in the United States to utilize 1.6 gpf (gallons per flush) rather than the 3.5 gpf that prevailed before the passage of EPAAct. The technological infrastructure was not in place at the time this change took effect, forcing plumbing contractors to deal with the public backlash from consumers. In 2007, the state of California lowered this standard below 1.6 and set a timetable for high efficiency toilets to take over the state market. Plumbing contractors are concerned that the current infrastructure and technology may not support the proper function of high efficiency toilets, once the equipment is installed. This would again create dissatisfaction for consumers, forcing plumbing contractors to again bear the brunt of consumer frustration. It is anticipated that the California standard for high efficiency toilets could be proposed as a national standard in the future.

PHCC Position: PHCC supports public policy designed to promote the efficient use of water in agriculture, municipalities, homes, businesses, factories, offices and institutions. Furthermore, PHCC supports public policy that mandates the installation and use of water-conserving plumbing systems that are proven effective through sound science and an approval process that includes all parties in open discussion and decision-making.

PHCC suggests that additional testing and analysis be performed to evaluate the compatibility of the existing water and sewer infrastructure. At this time there are concerns that America's existing infrastructure cannot handle the water efficient products being considered. Testing and analysis should be performed for both residential and commercial systems before mandates for high efficiency toilets or other ultra-low water consumption products are adopted. The impact of these low water consumption products on the entire plumbing system must be considered. In the future it is likely that the plumbing system will incorporate greywater, rain collection systems and other water-conserving technology that will be impacted by low water consumption products.

To facilitate the necessary implementation of these water conservation measures, PHCC supports the use of tax and other incentives, such as customer rebates for all new residential, commercial, industrial and institutional construction and renovation using water conservation and water-efficient products and systems installed by a qualified plumber. PHCC also supports efforts to fund and conduct comprehensive studies of all forms of water-conserving measures and research projects.

PHCC supports voluntary programs, such as the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) WaterSense program, in efforts to promote water-conserving products and services.

PHCC urges Congress to provide adequate funding for water-related legislative initiatives, including, but not limited to, annual EPA appropriations measures, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. Monies should also be dedicated toward research into recycled water technology and toward improvements in water and sewer infrastructure.

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