

# Water Smart Contractor Program: A Public-Private Partnership Ensuring Irrigation Efficiency in Southern Nevada

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The average Southern Nevada home uses approximately 70% of its water for landscaping, and one-third of that water is wasted. This fact, along with the use of return-flow credits for indoor water use, has led to much of the focus of Southern Nevada Water Authority's (SNWA) conservation programs emphasizing outdoor (or consumptive) water use.

Major programs such as the *Water Smart Landscapes* program and the *Irrigation Clock Rebate* program were developed to provide a financial incentive to encourage water users to either change their landscape to reduce water consumption or change their irrigation controller to one that could water their landscape more efficiently. These, along with other programs, various educational outreach events, and publications focus on encouraging residents to enhance their landscape's irrigation efficiency.

One of the foremost struggles when asking residents or businesses to make changes to their landscapes or irrigation hardware is that many don't know what to do, and they are often intimidated by the process. As a result, SNWA responded by offering classes and workshops for do-it-yourselfers and those who were willing to learn how to make those changes on their own. Conversely, many people including businesses prefer to hire a contractor to perform the work although finding a qualified contractor can be an intimidating process.

Unfortunately, the process of identifying qualified contractors is even more difficult in Southern Nevada due to the large number of unlicensed contractors doing landscape work in this area. Regrettably, as SNWA is a public agency, it is prohibited from recommending specific contractors to its customers. Moreover, contractors who are licensed and knowledgeable about irrigation may not be adequately informed on local laws and codes, Southern Nevada's water situation, or programs offered by SNWA. For these reasons, SNWA developed the *Water Smart Contractor* (WSC) program.

Only contractor companies that have a C-10 license (landscaping) with the State of Nevada Contractors' Board can become a Water Smart Contractor. The Nevada State Contractors' Board will issue an annually renewable contractor's license upon finding that an applicant has sufficient experience, a general knowledge of building and construction laws, is knowledgeable in the classification applied for, and is financially responsible. This license ensures that the contractor is bonded, providing protection for our customers.

In addition to having a C-10 license, the owner and a minimum of 50% of the company's supervisory staff, must attend eight hours of classroom training and pass examinations on the material covered in order to participate in this program. To enroll, the interested contractor or individual would visit [www.snwa.com](http://www.snwa.com), fill in an interest form, provide their license number, and download all the necessary forms. The eight-hour training is broken up into two, four-hour classes. The first session teaches contractors about regional water issues, local codes, laws

and regulations, landscape planning, plant selection, maintenance, and SNWA programs. The second session deals exclusively with efficient irrigation techniques. An exam is given at the end of each class. (This training is available in English and Spanish.)

Once 50% of the supervisory staff has attended the classes and passed the exams, and SNWA has received and verified their C-10 license, the contractor signs an agreement to meet WSC equipment and performance standards. These standards include abiding by all laws, codes, covenants, and standards on installing spray, drip, or other irrigation types. The company then receives a certificate stating that it is a Water Smart Contractor, decals to use on its vehicles, and the rights to use the WSC logo on business cards and advertisements, etc. The contractor's name is then added to the list of Water Smart Contractors on [www.snwa.com](http://www.snwa.com) along with contact information and photos of past work submitted by the company. (In 2004, SNWA's website had over 200,000 visitors.)

The list of Water Smart Contractors is maintained on SNWA's website to help our customers locate landscapers who are knowledgeable in desert landscaping, SNWA's programs, and efficient irrigation. This program is a vital tool for SNWA as it educates local contractors on its programs, local codes, and regulations regarding landscaping, challenges specific to our region such as weather and soil, as well as proper irrigation techniques for both grass and desert landscaping.

SNWA also offers an annual refresher course to keep participants up to date on issues regarding water conservation and SNWA's related programs. Water Smart Contractors are required to attend this course to retain their Water Smart Contractor designation.

This education better ensures that the landscape work performed by a Water Smart Contractor is achieved in such a way that water is used efficiently while keeping landscapes healthy and attractive. As homeowners see attractively xeriscaped front lawns appearing in their neighborhood, they are inspired to convert their grass to water-saving desert landscaping.

Finally, the Water Smart Contractor program creates a partnership between people who create programs focused on increasing landscape water efficiency in the community and those who are in the field making a living, working with customers, and working on the landscapes that SNWA's conservation programs are focused on sustaining.