



POSITION PAPER ON POLICY

WaterSense

Recommendation

Amend the law or add report language to a WaterSense program authorization that ensures the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency considers water quality issues during the development of program specifications.

Background

WaterSense is a program that partners with industries, businesses and utilities to identify, label and promote products, buildings, landscapes, facilities, processes and services that use water efficiently. The program is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In November 2010, WaterSense began the process of developing a specification to label self-regenerating water softeners as a water-efficient product. Self-regenerating water softeners are installed in homes to treat ("soften") water onsite. As part of the process, this type of water softener discharges a salty brine into the municipal wastewater system, which can degrade water quality. The brine can:

- cause the wastewater treatment facility to exceed discharge limits for pollutants such as chloride,
- cause elevated levels of chloride or total dissolved solids that prevent reuse of the water, and
- contribute to the local degradation of groundwater quality.

After learning about the potential adverse impacts to water, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency decided not to pursue a WaterSense specification for self-regenerating water softeners.

Benefits

- Adding this language will increase protection for water quality and support salinity management, which is particularly challenging in the Southwest United States, especially in Southern and Central California and Arizona where drinking water may already be high in chloride and total dissolved solids.
- Adding this language will protect supplies of recycled water which are critical, especially during the extreme drought in the Western U.S.

Support

- Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA)
- California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA)
- National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
- Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA)