



WaterSense® Home Certification System  
Version 2.0

February 2021

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## WaterSense® Home Certification System

### 1.0 Introduction

WaterSense, a partnership program sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), seeks to protect the future of our nation's water supply by offering people a simple way to use less water with water-efficient products, homes, and services. EPA established its WaterSense Labeled Homes Program to promote residential water efficiency and help enable market transformation in home construction. The WaterSense Labeled Homes Program aims to recognize the technical efficacy of existing home certification programs and relies on established home certification program infrastructure to facilitate the certification and labeling of homes for WaterSense.

This *WaterSense Home Certification System* (home certification system) outlines the requirements, roles, and responsibilities for all parties involved in the construction, verification, certification, and labeling of homes for WaterSense in accordance with the current *WaterSense Specification for Homes*,<sup>1</sup> including:

- Home builders
- Home Certification Organizations (HCOs)
- Verifiers
- Other parties to which the HCO has designated specific responsibilities for certifying homes (designees)

HCOs are central to the certification process and are responsible for implementing a program for the verification, certification, and labeling of homes that meet the requirements in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

This home certification system describes the requirements for and process by which EPA evaluates HCOs to ensure they have the capability, competence, and proper controls to certify homes and authorize the use of the WaterSense label.

This home certification system also describes the requirements for and process by which EPA will evaluate the HCO's proposed certification method (PCM), which includes the specific thresholds, criteria, and/or requirements the HCO intends to stipulate that homes pursuing the WaterSense label shall meet. EPA will ensure the certification method was developed in a fair and transparent manner.

Homes are required to be certified under an HCO's WaterSense Approved Certification Method (WACM) to earn the WaterSense label. Home builders who partner with WaterSense can seek certification and earn the WaterSense label through an HCO of their choosing.

This document shall be read in conjunction with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* and the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*.

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<sup>1</sup> The *WaterSense Home Certification System, Version 2.0* is effective with Version 2.0 and higher of the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

These documents each address a different aspect of the program structure, which together are essential for the certification and labeling of homes for WaterSense.

EPA will use the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods* to confirm whether the prospective HCO’s PCM is able to differentiate homes that meet WaterSense’s water efficiency requirement. The water efficiency requirement is set in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* to ensure that a WaterSense labeled home will be more water-efficient than a home with characteristics typical of new construction (based on national standards and common design and landscape practices). The PCM becomes a WACM upon EPA’s approval.

WaterSense is including by reference that parties must comply with the *WaterSense Program Guidelines*, *WaterSense Program Mark Guidelines*, and any related technical clarifications issued by WaterSense related to the program requirements or EPA’s implementation of the WaterSense Labeled Homes Program.

All of these program documents, summarized in Table 1, provide the minimum requirements and the roles and responsibilities for building, certifying, and labeling homes under the WaterSense Labeled Homes Program. Please see the introduction to each document for a thorough explanation of its purpose and role within the program.

**Table 1. Documents Applicable to the Verification, Certification, and Labeling of Homes for WaterSense**

Full Title of Document	Purpose
<i>WaterSense Specification for Homes</i>	Establishes the technical criteria for water-efficient homes to be eligible for the WaterSense label. For Version 2.0 (current at time of publication) this includes compliance with 1) the Mandatory Checklist, and 2) the water efficiency requirement, as verified through compliance with an HCO’s WACM. Note that from this point forward, references to the <i>WaterSense Specification for Homes</i> are inclusive of the Mandatory Checklist and, by reference, the technical requirements of an HCO’s WACM. References to the <i>WaterSense Specification for Homes</i> refer to the most current version available on the WaterSense website.
<i>WaterSense Home Certification System</i>	Articulates the parties involved in, and process for, certifying and labeling homes for WaterSense.
<i>WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods</i>	Explains EPA’s process and assumptions used to assess the technical efficacy of the HCO’s proposed certification method in differentiating homes that meet the water efficiency requirement in the <i>WaterSense Specification for Homes</i> . References to the <i>WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods</i> refer to the most current version available on the WaterSense website.

**Table 1. Documents Applicable to the Verification, Certification, and Labeling of Homes for WaterSense**

Full Title of Document	Purpose
<i>WaterSense Program Guidelines</i>	Provides guidance on eligibility criteria, conditions for participation, and general information about WaterSense. References to the <i>WaterSense Program Guidelines</i> refer to the most current version available on the WaterSense website.
<i>WaterSense Program Mark Guidelines</i>	Establishes guidelines for using WaterSense program marks in order to ensure promotion of a consistent WaterSense brand. HCOs and partners are required to adhere to these guidelines. References to the <i>WaterSense Program Mark Guidelines</i> refer to the most current version available on the WaterSense website.

## 2.0 Effective Date

This update to the WaterSense Labeled Homes Program is available to prospective HCOs and (upon approval) their verifiers and stakeholders as of February 2021. Upon approval, HCOs can immediately begin certifying and labeling homes according to the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

Builder partners should reference the *WaterSense Labeled Homes Program Transition to Version 2* for information on the schedule for transitioning certification and labeling of homes from Version 1.2 to Version 2.0 of the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

## 3.0 References and Definitions

In addition to the documents listed in Table 1, the following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this home certification system. Definitions within all of these documents are included by reference. For any of the referenced documents below, the most recent version applies, if the version is not otherwise indicated.

- **HCO licensing agreement** between EPA and the HCO.
- **Application** for HCO approval.
- **Builder partnership agreement** between EPA and a builder of WaterSense labeled homes.
- **Technical clarifications**, developed and maintained by EPA.

Other definitions applicable to this home certification system include:

**Builder Partner:** A home builder that has committed to building, renovating, or otherwise producing homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, which includes the Mandatory Checklist and the water efficiency requirement, to be addressed through an HCO's WACM. The builder shall signify such commitment by signing a WaterSense builder partnership agreement with EPA.

**Builder Partnership Agreement:** Formal agreement between EPA and the builder that delineates program benefits, exclusions, and activities (i.e., partner pledges and EPA commitments) to be conducted by each party.

**Certification Method Technical Evaluation Process:** Process and requirements, described in detail in the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*, by which EPA will evaluate the technical efficacy of the HCO's PCM to ensure that it can differentiate homes that meet the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

**Designee(s):** Party(ies) to which the HCO has delegated specific responsibilities associated with verifying, certifying, and/or overseeing the verification and/or certification of WaterSense labeled homes, as allowable under this certification system.

**Home Certification Organization (HCO):** An independent organization approved and licensed by EPA to certify and label homes. An HCO is responsible for administering a WACM that demonstrates the ability to differentiate homes that meet the water efficiency requirements in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. An HCO is also responsible for the training and authorization of verifiers and overseeing the verification, certification, and labeling of homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

**Licensing Agreement:** The legal document between EPA and an HCO that grants the HCO access to, and conditions for authorizing the use and distribution of, the WaterSense label. Outlines the terms, roles, and responsibilities for certifying and labeling homes for WaterSense in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. The licensing agreement signals the HCO's and EPA's commitment to cooperate in the administration of the WaterSense Labeled Homes Program in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* and this *WaterSense Home Certification System*.

**Mandatory Checklist:** Minimum set of requirements detailed in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* that a home must meet to earn the WaterSense label.

**Proposed Certification Method (PCM):** Methodology proposed by an HCO to evaluate a home's compliance with the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. The PCM includes the technical requirements or criteria and the certification threshold homes must meet to demonstrate adherence to the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

**WaterSense Approved Certification Method (WACM):** A certification method that EPA has evaluated in accordance with the certification method technical evaluation process and has determined can effectively differentiate homes that meet the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. In addition to the Mandatory Checklist, the WACM serves as the basis for certifying and labeling homes for the WaterSense program.

**WaterSense Home Verifier (Verifier):** Individual who is trained and authorized by an HCO or its designee to verify homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, which

includes the Mandatory Checklist, and by reference the requirements of the HCO's WACM under which they are authorized.<sup>2</sup>

**WaterSense Label:** A registered certification mark that contains the words “WaterSense” and “Meets EPA Criteria” in a circular pattern around the WaterSense graphic “water drop” image. To signify a home’s compliance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, an HCO or its designee will provide the WaterSense label to the builder partner in the form of a certificate or sticker. References to the certificate or sticker are considered synonymous with the WaterSense label and, as such, the terms may be used interchangeably throughout this document.

#### 4.0 HCO Eligibility and WACM Requirements

In accordance with the requirements and procedures set forth in this section, EPA shall evaluate and approve the HCO and its PCM. The PCM becomes a WACM upon EPA’s approval. This evaluation shall include three components:

- HCO Organizational Requirements (Section 4.1): EPA shall evaluate the HCO’s organizational structure and processes and procedures in place to conduct the verification, certification, and labeling of homes for WaterSense. An HCO may use a designee (Section 4.2) to meet many of the organizational requirements.
- Certification Method Development Process (Section 4.3): EPA shall evaluate the process by which the technical requirements of an HCO’s PCM were developed to ensure openness and transparency.
- Certification Method Technical Evaluation Process (Section 4.4): EPA shall evaluate the technical efficacy of the HCO’s PCM in demonstrating homes’ compliance with the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

Interested HCOs shall apply to EPA in accordance with the process described in Section 5.0.

#### 4.1 HCO Organizational Requirements

WaterSense has identified six components of certification, described in the subsections below, that ensure an HCO has a structure in place to effectively certify homes and issue and maintain the integrity of the WaterSense label. These include:

- Independent oversight
- Quality assurance
- Verifier training and authorization
- Home verification protocols
- Impartiality
- Messaging and reporting

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<sup>2</sup> A verifier may be an employee of a designee, an employee associated with an independent organization that contracts for verification services, an individual that contracts for verification services, or, under certain circumstances, a direct employee of the HCO.

The HCO shall demonstrate to EPA, through documentation supplied in its application (see Section 5.1), that it meets the requirements outlined in this section.

The HCO may delegate certain organizational requirements outlined below to a designee(s). A designee can be a provider that hires or contracts with raters or verifiers, or other organization capable of adhering to the certification requirements, as relevant to the specific responsibility being designated. The use of designees is more fully described in Section 4.2.

#### 4.1.1 Independent Oversight

The HCO shall maintain independent oversight procedures to ensure that the certification and labeling of homes for WaterSense is governed in a fair and impartial manner. This shall include:

- **Maintaining independent oversight.** The HCO shall maintain independent oversight of its program related to WaterSense, while exercising independent professional judgment. The HCO shall demonstrate that the individuals responsible for oversight of the program are not involved in the routine program operations or certification decisions.

#### 4.1.2 Quality Assurance

The HCO shall implement quality assurance procedures that ensure that verifiers consistently inspect and document compliance in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, which includes the Mandatory Checklist and, by reference, the technical requirements of the HCO's WACM. The quality assurance shall include:

- **Auditing WaterSense labeled homes.** The HCO shall audit a subset of homes that have received the WaterSense label to ensure homes are meeting the requirements of the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* (including the requirements of an HCO's WACM). The audit shall include a representative sample of WaterSense labeled homes such that it demonstrates the capacity to identify erroneous certifications.
- **Ensuring qualified verifiers.** The HCO shall only use verifiers in good standing with all training and impartiality requirements, as described in Section 4.1.3 and 4.1.5, respectively, to provide verification services.
- **Disciplining verifiers.** The HCO shall maintain and enforce disciplinary procedures for verifiers that do not meet the quality requirements of the HCO.
- **Resolving complaints.** The HCO shall maintain and execute procedures to respond to and resolve complaints involving home verification and/or certification. This includes investigating failures impacting the water efficiency of certified homes.
- **Maintaining quality assurance documentation.** The HCO shall maintain thorough documentation of quality assurance activities including audit results, verifier training/authorization records, verifier discipline records, and complaint resolutions.

#### 4.1.3 Verifier Training and Authorization

The HCO shall train and authorize verifiers to verify homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, as well as any administrative procedures used by the HCO for oversight of the certification process, reporting, or other communications. At a minimum, this shall include:



- **Training verifiers on home verification and documentation procedures.** The HCO shall train verifiers to properly document home verifications and complete all reporting required by the HCO and WaterSense. WaterSense shall supply each HCO with required training materials for the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* (hereafter referred to as WaterSense program-specific training requirements). If applicable, the HCO shall supplement this training with additional information needed for the verifiers to understand and administer the HCO's WACM.
- **Providing verifier training reciprocity.** The HCO may waive any WaterSense program-specific training requirements for potential new verifiers, provided that the verifier has completed the WaterSense program-specific training requirements within the past two years (for example, as part of training under another HCO). The WaterSense program-specific training requirements are the only training requirements subject to this transferability. There is no obligation or expectation that the WACM-specific training or any supplemental training provided by individual HCOs will be transferable. Additionally, HCOs that utilize designees for quality assurance shall have procedures in place to facilitate transferability of verifiers from one designee to another.
- **Formally authorizing verifiers.** The HCO shall formally authorize verifiers to verify homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* and the HCO's WACM. The requirements for verifier authorization shall include, at a minimum: documentation of successful completion of training; and evaluation, disclosure, and resolution of conflicts of interest (COI), as outlined in Section 4.1.5. The HCO shall maintain a list of authorized verifiers and periodically report authorized verifiers to EPA, as described in Section 4.1.6.
- **Integrating updates.** In the event of modifications or clarifications to the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* or the HCO's WACM requirements, the HCO shall retrain verifiers on the new program requirements before the verifier inspects additional homes. The HCO shall maintain up-to-date training records.

#### 4.1.4 Home Verification Protocols

The HCO shall implement home verification protocols, which shall include, at a minimum:

- **Requiring verifiers to adhere to the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.** The HCO shall ensure verifiers conduct verifications in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.
- **Verifying builder partnership agreement with EPA.** The HCO shall verify that any builder seeking home certification in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* has a signed WaterSense builder partnership agreement in place prior to issuing the WaterSense label and associated certification documentation.
- **Maintaining verification documentation.** The HCO shall obtain home verification documentation (e.g., checklists, scorecards) from verifiers. At a minimum, the documentation shall include:
  - o Builder partner contact information;
  - o Address or lot number of the verified home (and address or lot number of any homes covered by a relevant sampling protocol);
  - o Documentation of verification results sufficient to recreate the verification per the requirements of the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*;

- o WACM version number under which the home was certified;
  - o Name and contact information for the verifier; and
  - o Home verification date(s).
- **Sampling protocol.** The HCO may offer builder partners the opportunity to participate in a sampling protocol if a builder partner intends to certify multiple homes within the same subdivision, planned community, or multifamily building. Sampling protocols could allow a builder to seek the WaterSense label for a group of homes based on pre-analysis of building plans and subsequent verification of a sample set of the homes. If the HCO chooses to offer a sampling protocol for home certification, the protocol shall outline eligibility requirements for participation in the sampling protocol and ensure that verification occurs on a representative sample of homes constructed by the builder partner. The protocol shall also establish processes for revoking eligibility for sampling based on failure to meet certification and quality assurance requirements.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.1.5 Impartiality

The HCO shall have a systematic method for ensuring financial, legal, and ethical impartiality as it pertains to verifying a home's compliance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* and the HCO's WACM, and as it pertains to issuing the WaterSense label. The HCO's impartiality management strategy shall account for both organizational and individual COI. Organizational COI pertains to the organization(s) responsible for various aspects of home verification and certification, whereas individual COI pertains to a specific person involved in the verification or certification decision. Examples of COI include, but are not limited to, an organization or individual:

- Providing consulting or design services for a home.
- Acting as the seller of the home or the seller's agent.
- Acting as the lender for some portion of the financed payments on the home.
- Selling, supplying, or installing products to facilitate the home meeting the specification criteria.
- Participating in both verification and sales or marketing activities of the HCO.

##### 4.1.5.1 HCO Impartiality

The HCO is responsible for implementing its COI strategy for the organization and any individuals under its direct employ.

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<sup>3</sup> In Version 1.2 of the *WaterSense New Home Certification System*, EPA defined the sampling protocol to include the successful inspection of the first seven homes within a subdivision, planned community, or multifamily building, after which the verifier could randomly select and verify one home from every additional group of seven homes. To provide additional flexibility under this version of the certification system, the HCO may choose to implement sampling at a lower rate, provided it demonstrates to EPA that it has other quality assurance activities in place to ensure continued compliance with the requirements of the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

#### 4.1.5.2 Verifier Impartiality

An HCO that uses verifiers outside of its direct employ shall implement a verifier COI strategy that includes the following:

- **Verifier COI disclosure.** The HCO shall require current or prospective verifiers to disclose any potential or existing COI.
- **Written verifier COI policy.** The HCO shall have procedures for evaluating and resolving potential COI disclosed by the external verifiers. This may include, for example, written procedures for resolving COI or provisions that prohibit the existence of actual or perceived COI. If applicable, the HCO must also have established procedures to be enacted in the event that COI cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

If the HCO assigns a designee(s) to implement the verifier COI policy, it shall have procedures in place to ensure the designee's compliance with the verifier COI strategy.

#### 4.1.5.3 Designee Impartiality

An HCO that uses a designee(s) as allowed by this certification system shall implement a designee COI strategy that includes the following:

- **Designee COI disclosure.** The HCO shall require current or prospective designees to disclose any potential or existing COI.
- **Written designee COI policy.** The HCO shall have procedures for evaluating and resolving COI presented by a designee. This may include, for example, written procedures for resolving COI or provisions that prohibit the existence of actual or perceived COI. If applicable, the HCO must also have established procedures to be enacted in the event that COI issues cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

#### 4.1.6 Messaging and Reporting

The HCO shall ensure information flow from WaterSense to the HCO (messaging) and information flow from the HCO to WaterSense (reporting). The HCO shall also ensure that relevant information is conveyed in a timely manner among WaterSense and the HCO's designee(s), builders, and verifiers. At a minimum, the HCO's messaging and reporting procedures shall include:

- **Centralized messaging structure.** The HCO shall have a structure that enables it to disseminate information from WaterSense to relevant stakeholders. Stakeholders can include designees, verifiers, and/or builders. Messaging shall be complete, clear, and timely.
- **Inquiry response system.** The HCO shall have procedures for stakeholders to submit questions about home certifications and the WaterSense label. The HCO shall have a means of providing accurate and timely responses to these inquiries.
- **Quarterly reporting to WaterSense.** The HCO shall report home certification information to WaterSense at least quarterly in a format approved by EPA. At minimum, the HCO shall provide the following information regarding the homes certified and WaterSense labels issued in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*:

- o Builder partner name;
  - o Number of certified homes; and
  - o General location of certified home(s), including development (if applicable), city, state, and zip code.
- **Non-routine requests for reporting program information to WaterSense.** The HCO shall provide additional program information to WaterSense in a timely manner, as requested. On occasion, WaterSense may request information about topics including, but not limited to:
    - o Checklists for specific homes;
    - o Promotional materials created by the HCO and/or its designee(s); and
    - o Common non-conformities or issues encountered during the past quarter
  - **Maintaining information about authorized verifiers and reporting to WaterSense.** The HCO shall maintain basic information about authorized verifiers. In addition, the HCO shall report information about its authorized verifiers to WaterSense at least quarterly. WaterSense shall provide the HCO with a standardized format for reporting, which shall include, at a minimum, the following information for each authorized verifier:
    - o Name;
    - o Employer (or company name if self-employed);
    - o Phone number;
    - o Email address (if available);
    - o Website URL (if available);
    - o Address and/or service area (e.g., state(s), zip codes, and/or markets where verification services are offered); and
    - o Confirmation that the information about the verifier can be made publicly available.

#### 4.2 HCO Responsibilities for the Use of Designees

The HCO may delegate certain responsibilities to one or more designees, with the exception of the responsibilities described below. In the instance of delegation, the HCO shall provide WaterSense with information about the use of designee(s) and shall submit sufficient information on policies that it requires designee(s) to follow. If the HCO plans to use a designee(s), the HCO shall also submit its procedures for overseeing the designee(s) and the fulfillment of their responsibilities. Procedures shall also include the process by which an HCO will remove a designee if it fails to meet the HCO's requirements.

EPA has identified specific requirements the HCO may not delegate. Specifically, the HCO itself must:

- Maintain the final authority over the certification decision and issuance of the WaterSense label as outlined in Section 5.3;
- Establish and implement impartiality requirements as outlined in Section 4.1.5; and
- Report information on authorized verifiers and certified homes to WaterSense as outlined in Section 4.1.6.

HCOs using a designee(s) shall implement procedures that include, at a minimum, the following, as applicable to the responsibilities of the designee(s):

- **Overseeing designee(s) performing quality assurance activities.** If an HCO assigns a designee(s) to fulfill some or all of its quality assurance services, the HCO shall monitor and oversee the designee(s) to ensure that it follows the quality assurance procedures and requirements established by the HCO.
- **Overseeing designee(s) performing verifier training.** If an HCO assigns a designee(s) to train and authorize verifiers, the HCO shall develop or approve the designee training program and monitor and oversee the designee(s) to ensure that they are fulfilling the training requirements. The HCO shall retain and maintain a list of trained and authorized verifiers from the designee(s).
- **Collecting information from designee(s) and verifiers.** The HCO shall collect data from its designee(s) needed to satisfy WaterSense reporting requirements.

### 4.3 HCO Certification Method Development Process

In developing the technical requirements included in the PCM, the HCO shall follow one of the three approaches outlined below to demonstrate that the requirements were developed following an open and transparent process.

- **Utilize an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approved standard or standard developed through an equivalent consensus-based standard development process.** The technical requirements in the PCM are included in a standard that was developed and approved through an ANSI or equivalent consensus-based standard development process.
- **Follow requirements for the jurisdiction with authority (for public agencies).** For HCOs that operate under the auspices of a public agency, the HCO shall demonstrate that the technical requirements included in the PCM were developed in compliance with the administrative and transparency requirements for standards and policy development of the jurisdiction having authority over the program.
- **Demonstrate development in accordance with the certification method alternative development requirements.** If neither of the first two requirements can be met, the HCO shall provide documentation demonstrating that the technical requirements included in the PCM were developed in accordance with the criteria and requirements described in Table 2. These criteria are based on the ANSI Essential Requirements,<sup>4</sup> but have been modified to apply to certification method development for WaterSense.

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<sup>4</sup> ANSI Essential Requirements: Due process requirements for American National Standards. January 2020.

**Table 2. Certification Method Alternative Development Requirements**

Criteria	Requirement
Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation in certification method development shall be open to all persons who are directly and materially affected by the certification method. There shall be no undue financial barriers to participation. Voting membership shall not be conditional upon membership in any organization, or unreasonably restricted on the basis of technical qualifications or other such requirements.</li> <li>▪ Timely and adequate notice of any action to create, revise, reaffirm, or withdraw the certification method, and the establishment of a new certification method development body, shall be provided to all known directly and materially affected interests. Notice shall include a clear and meaningful description of the purpose of the proposed activity and shall identify a readily available source for further information.</li> <li>• The member's name (or if membership is by organization, the name of the organization with a point of contact), affiliation, and interest category of each member shall be made available to interested parties upon request.</li> </ul>
Lack of Dominance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The certification method development process shall not be dominated by any single interest category, individual, or organization. Dominance means a position or exercise of dominant authority, leadership, or influence by reason of superior leverage, strength, or representation to the exclusion of fair and equitable consideration of other viewpoints.</li> </ul>
Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The certification method development process shall have a balance of interests. Participants from diverse interest categories shall be sought with the objective of achieving balance. If the membership lacks balance, outreach to achieve balance shall be undertaken. Balance means that no single interest category constitutes a majority of the membership.</li> <li>▪ In defining interest categories appropriate, consideration shall be given to at least the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builders</li> <li>• Home certification community</li> <li>• Manufacturers</li> <li>• Utilities</li> <li>• Municipalities</li> <li>• General interest</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Notification of Certification Method Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Notification of certification method development activity shall be announced in suitable media as appropriate to demonstrate an opportunity for participation by all directly and materially affected persons.</li> <li>▪ Public review is made available for a minimum of 30 days prior to the final publication of the certification method.</li> </ul>
Consideration of Views and Objections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prompt consideration shall be given to the written views and objections of all participants.</li> <li>▪ A publicly available written response shall be provided to comments on formal ballots or public reviews drafts.</li> </ul>
Consensus Vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence of consensus in accordance with these requirements and the procedures of the certification method developer shall be documented.</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Certification Method Alternative Development Requirements**

Criteria	Requirement
Appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Written procedures shall contain an identifiable, realistic, and readily available appeals mechanism for the impartial handling of procedural appeals regarding any action or inaction. Procedural appeals include whether a technical issue was afforded due process.</li> <li>▪ Persons who have directly and materially affected interests and who have been or will be adversely affected by any procedural action or inaction with regard to the certification method development (or the revision, reaffirmation, or withdrawal of the certification method), have the right to appeal.</li> </ul>

#### 4.4 Technical Evaluation Process for the HCO’s Certification Method

EPA shall evaluate the technical efficacy of the PCM in accordance with its *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods* to ensure that the PCM can differentiate homes that meet the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. Upon approval, the PCM becomes the HCO’s WACM that can be used in conjunction with the Mandatory Checklist to verify a home’s compliance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. For more details on EPA’s technical evaluation process, see the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*.

The HCO shall submit its PCM, including the technical requirements and all associated thresholds or other criteria that the HCO will use to determine compliance with WaterSense’s efficiency requirement, to EPA for evaluation as part of the application process described in Section 5.1.

EPA’s intent is to recognize a WACM for a period of five (5) years as long as it is not revised by the HCO such that the revisions could impact its ability to differentiate homes that meet EPA’s water efficiency requirement. However, as described in Section 9.2, EPA reserves the right to modify the certification method technical evaluation process from time to time to clarify requirements or as technological and/or market changes affect the usefulness of the requirements to HCOs, builders, consumers, industry, or the environment. At the end of the five (5) years, if EPA has updated or revised the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*, EPA reserves the right to re-evaluate an HCO’s WACM to ensure that it can continue to differentiate homes that meet the efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.

If the requirements of the HCO’s WACM are revised prior to the end of the five (5)-year period, the HCO shall notify EPA of these revisions pursuant to Section 9.1. EPA will assess the HCO’s updated certification method using the latest version of the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*.

#### 5.0 Procedures and Requirements for HCOs

EPA shall evaluate an HCO’s organizational structure and PCM prior to licensing the HCO to certify and label homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, which includes the Mandatory Checklist and, by reference, the requirements stipulated in the WACM to achieve the water efficiency requirement. This section outlines the HCO’s application and

licensing procedures and summarizes the HCO's roles and responsibilities under this certification system.

## 5.1 Application Procedures for HCOs

An HCO interested in certifying and labeling homes for WaterSense shall submit an application to EPA, including all necessary documentation to demonstrate compliance with the requirements in Section 4.0. EPA shall supply, and the HCO shall complete, the application form. A copy of the application form, *Application for Home Certification Organization (HCO) and Proposed Certification Method (PCM) Approval*, is available on the WaterSense [website](#).

In addition, the HCO shall provide with its application:

- **Documentation of Organizational Requirements:** The HCO shall document compliance with the organizational requirements listed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2. This shall include information on the use and oversight of any designee(s).
- **Documentation of Certification Method Development:** The HCO shall document compliance with the requirements of the process used to develop the technical requirements included in its PCM, as described in Section 4.3.
- **Copy of the Proposed Certification Method:** The HCO shall supply EPA with a copy of its PCM and all necessary supporting documentation to support EPA's evaluation of the method's technical efficacy in accordance with the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*. This shall include the thresholds and criteria the HCO plans to implement to meet the water efficiency requirement in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*.
- **Point of Contact:** The HCO shall designate a point of contact in its application and shall provide that individual's contact information. This point of contact shall be responsible for communicating and disseminating information to and from EPA as appropriate and will be listed on the WaterSense website as the point of contact regarding the HCO's certification offerings for WaterSense.

The application form is available on the WaterSense [website](#). Completed applications and all supporting documentation shall be emailed to the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov).

### 5.1.1 Provisional Approval

EPA retains the right to provisionally approve an HCO for select requirements where an HCO requires modification to fully adhere to EPA's organizational and certification method development requirements (as set forth in Sections 4.1, 4.2 [if applicable], and 4.3). Requirements that may be considered for provisional approval are detailed in the *Application for Home Certification Organization (HCO) and Proposed Certification Method (PCM) Approval*. For any requirement for which an HCO is provisionally approved, EPA will work with the HCO to develop a plan that outlines the conditions and timeline for full compliance with the requirements. These terms will be detailed in the HCO's licensing agreement with EPA.



## 5.2 HCO Licensure

Upon receipt and evaluation of the application and supporting documentation, if the HCO meets all criteria satisfactorily, EPA shall notify the HCO that it is eligible to sign a licensing agreement. The HCO shall return signed copies of a licensing agreement supplied by EPA. This is a legal document between EPA and the HCO that grants the HCO access to, and conditions for authorizing the use and distribution of, the WaterSense label for homes. It also outlines the terms and roles and responsibilities for certifying and labeling homes in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. The licensing agreement signals the HCO's and EPA's commitment to cooperate in the administration of the WaterSense Labeled Homes Program in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, the HCO's WACM, and this *WaterSense Home Certification System*.

EPA shall return signed and fully executed copies of the licensing agreement to the HCO along with an electronic version of the WaterSense label, WaterSense label certificate, and any WaterSense-specific training or other program materials. The signed agreement signifies that the HCO is authorized to train verifiers, certify homes, and issue the WaterSense label.

EPA shall maintain a listing of licensed HCOs and their respective WACMs on the WaterSense website.

EPA reserves the right to terminate the licensing agreement for any HCO that does not actively fulfill the requirements outlined in this certification system.

## 5.3 Issuing the WaterSense Label

Prior to issuing the WaterSense label, the HCO shall ensure, either directly or through procedures established with its designee(s), that a builder partnership agreement is in place (and signed by both the builder and EPA, as described in Section 6.1). To verify the partnership, the HCO or its designee(s) should check the WaterSense [website](#) for a current list of builder partners. If the builder is not listed as a partner on the WaterSense website, the HCO or its designee(s) can verify the partnership agreement by contacting the WaterSense Helpline at (866) WTR-SENS (987-7367) or [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov).

The HCO shall maintain the final authority over the certification decision and issuance of the WaterSense label. It shall confirm that a builder partner's home(s) conform with and have been verified in accordance with its WACM and the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, which includes the Mandatory Checklist. The HCO shall document its certification decision, and the HCO or its designee shall complete and provide to the builder partner the WaterSense label certificate for each certified home, which includes:

- A certification statement that the home has been certified to meet the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*;
- The name of the builder partner;
- The name/company of the authorized verifier;
- The name of the HCO;
- The address or lot number of the certified home; and

- The date of certification.

At the time the WaterSense label is issued, the HCO shall also supply the builder partner with guidelines on proper use of the WaterSense program marks.

### 5.3.1 Exemptions for Conflicts With Local Code

EPA does not intend for the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* to exempt homes from adhering to local codes, standards, or regulations. All homes shall obtain building permits, as applicable, and therefore will need to meet local and state code requirements, regardless of whether the builder is pursuing the WaterSense label for the home.

However, there is potential for local standards and codes to conflict with EPA's requirements detailed in the Mandatory Checklist included in the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. In these cases, the HCO shall consult with EPA by contacting the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov). EPA will consider and respond to such conflicts on a case-by-case basis and provide exceptions where appropriate.

## 5.4 Reporting and Recordkeeping

HCOs shall maintain records associated with program operations and routinely submit documentation about verifiers and homes that have received the WaterSense label directly to the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov).

### 5.4.1 Reporting Authorized Verifiers to EPA

The HCO shall maintain a list of authorized verifiers who have met all training, impartiality, and other requirements as outlined in the HCO's approved organizational requirements. At least quarterly, the HCO shall submit a complete list of authorized verifiers to the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov). See Section 4.1.6 for details on information that should be included in the HCO's report.

At its discretion, EPA may post the list of authorized verifiers (and/or associated employer) to the WaterSense website, so that builder partners can find specific verifiers in their area who can provide verification services for WaterSense and the HCO's WACM. EPA may also use the contact information provided to contact authorized verifiers or to provide informative updates about the WaterSense program. HCOs can notify the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov) regarding verifiers who choose to opt out of communication.

### 5.4.2 Reporting WaterSense Labeled Homes to EPA

The HCO shall report at least quarterly to the WaterSense Helpline regarding the homes that they have certified within the previous quarter. See Section 4.1.6 for details on information that should be included in the HCO's report.

### 5.4.3 Maintaining Records

The HCO shall maintain records related to its implementation of the WACM and certification and labeling of homes for WaterSense and shall be able to provide EPA with access to or copies of

the records upon request. In instances where a specific certification responsibility is delegated, as allowed under this certification system, the HCO shall ensure that the designee(s) maintains the relevant records and that it has access to the records upon request. The HCO and/or designee(s) shall maintain all relevant records for a minimum of three (3) years. At a minimum, these records shall include:

- Documentation of quality assurance activities;
- Verifier training and authorizations;
- Verification records;
- COI disclosures and resolutions; and
- Documentation to support certification decisions.

## 6.0 Procedures and Requirements for Builder Partners

This section outlines the requirements and procedures for WaterSense builder partners. Builders that partner with EPA can earn WaterSense certification through an HCO of their choosing. To earn the WaterSense label, candidate homes will be verified and certified in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, which includes the Mandatory Checklist, and, by reference, requirements in the selected HCO's WACM to achieve the water efficiency requirement.

### 6.1 Partnership With EPA

Builders shall [sign a builder partnership agreement](#) with EPA as described in the *WaterSense Program Guidelines* if they wish to obtain the WaterSense label for their homes. Receipt of the WaterSense label is contingent upon partnership and home certification. The HCO or its designee shall verify that the builder has a partnership agreement in place with EPA as part of the certification process and prior to issuing the WaterSense label.

EPA shall maintain a list of builder partners that have built or plan to build WaterSense labeled homes.

As part of the builder partnership agreement with EPA, the builder shall provide EPA with:

- Contact information;
- Company website, if applicable; and
- A list of states and/or localities in which they build.

EPA shall post this information on its builder partner list on the WaterSense website. The registry may also include the general location (city, state) and number of WaterSense labeled homes for each builder partner, as reported by the respective HCO.

### 6.2 Application

The builder partner shall apply for certification for each individual home. To initiate the verification and certification process, the builder partner shall identify the WACM under which it would like to obtain certification and contact the respective HCO or one of its authorized verifiers

directly. EPA shall maintain a list of HCOs, information regarding the HCO's WACM, and a list of associated authorized verifiers on the WaterSense website, including the localities where the authorized verifiers offer verification services for the HCO's program.

### **6.3 Home Certification and Labeling**

The builder partner shall work with the HCO or its designee(s) and authorized verifiers to determine a home's compliance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. This includes compliance with all quality assurance and oversight requirements specified by the HCO. Upon verification, the HCO shall provide documentation of certification, and the HCO or its designee will present the builder partner with a copy of the WaterSense label.

The WaterSense label indicates that the home has been certified to conform to the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. A WaterSense label shall not create any express or implied warranty. At the time the WaterSense label is issued, the HCO or designee shall also supply the builder partner with guidance on proper use of the WaterSense label. The builder partner is then allowed to advertise that the home conforms to the specification and has earned the label. Any promotion of the WaterSense label shall be directly related to the certified home or to a community of homes that earn the WaterSense label individually. EPA will also provide builder partners with promotional resources that will help them to advertise and market their intent to build homes to meet the WaterSense specification.

## **7.0 EPA Oversight**

EPA is responsible for overseeing the HCO's implementation of the certification and labeling of homes for WaterSense.

### **7.1 General HCO Oversight**

EPA reserves the right to audit the operations and records of an HCO and/or its designee(s) to ensure that the HCO is meeting the responsibilities under this certification system. EPA shall request, and the HCO shall provide EPA with, documentation to facilitate the operations and records audit.

As part of its oversight responsibilities, EPA shall investigate and respond to complaints pertaining to HCOs. Complaints may be submitted directly to the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov).

If EPA discovers that the HCO is failing to meet its responsibilities under this certification system, it will notify the HCO and will coordinate corrective action or, if necessary, suspend or revoke the HCO's participation in the program. In the event that an HCO fails to satisfy its responsibilities, EPA can terminate the HCO's licensing agreement. These measures can be temporary or permanent at EPA's discretion, depending on the severity of the issue.

### **7.2 Surveillance of Home Conformance and Label Use**

EPA also reserves the right to conduct periodic in-home inspections of labeled homes prior to their sale or initial occupancy and to periodically review websites and other certification references and WaterSense label usages. In the case of an in-home inspection, EPA will

coordinate the visit with the builder partner and the home's verifier and/or HCO, so as not to delay the certification process. If nonconformities with the specification are identified, EPA will notify the HCO and/or the builder partner and will engage in corrective or other necessary action in accordance with Section 8.0 of this document.

## 8.0 Suspension or Withdrawal of the WaterSense Label From Homes

The HCO is responsible for notifying EPA of specific instances of nonconformity. Nonconformity may include, but is not limited to:

- Receipt of formal complaints from home buyers or other interested parties indicating that a certified home's water-efficient features were generally misrepresented (e.g., multiple features do not comply with the specification).
- Instances where the HCO or its designee discovers that a builder is fraudulently or falsely claiming that its homes have been certified and labeled in accordance with the *WaterSense Specification for Homes* and this certification system.

EPA is responsible for engaging the builder partner in corrective action and for determining when the use of the WaterSense label should be suspended or withdrawn due to nonconformance or improper use of or reference to the WaterSense label. EPA might also discover nonconformance or improper use or reference to the WaterSense label from its stakeholders or during periodic reviews of certification and label usage. If EPA discovers nonconformance or certification and labeling issues, it will notify the HCO that issued the WaterSense label and will coordinate corrective action or, if necessary, label suspension or withdrawal.

WaterSense label suspension can occur for a limited period of time as specified by EPA. During the period of suspension, the builder partner is prohibited from using the WaterSense label in conjunction with the home in question and with any home built after the issuance of a suspension, until such time as EPA indicates the suspension can be removed. The HCO shall assist EPA as necessary by revoking the WaterSense label from the home in question, determining when the terms for suspension removal have been fulfilled, ensuring that no new WaterSense labels are issued during the period of suspension, and upon EPA's approval, reissuing the WaterSense label to the builder partner for the home in question.

In more severe or repeated instances of nonconformity, improper use or reference to the WaterSense label, or failure to meet the requirements for reinstatement of a suspended WaterSense label, EPA will rescind the WaterSense label from all of the builder partner's certified homes that have not yet been sold. EPA will notify the builder partner that the certification and WaterSense label are being withdrawn.

If a builder's use of the WaterSense label is withdrawn for any reason, EPA will require that the builder partner cease to advertise the certification of its homes to the WaterSense specification, and the label shall be eliminated immediately from homes not already sold. EPA will inform the HCO that the builder partner is no longer allowed to use or receive the WaterSense label and will decide whether termination of the builder partnership agreement or other corrective action is warranted. The HCO will assist EPA as necessary by rescinding the WaterSense label from all

certified homes that have not yet been sold and will not issue any new WaterSense labels to the builder partner.

## 9.0 Amendments, Modifications, and Revisions

In the course of program operations, the HCO and/or EPA may decide to change certain elements of program structure and function. The following sections describe procedures to be followed in the event of amendments, modifications, and/or revisions initiated either by the HCO or EPA.

### 9.1 HCO-Initiated Changes to Organizational or WACM Requirements

The HCO shall notify EPA in writing about any proposed organizational or WACM changes that materially affect its ability to comply with the requirements outlined in this certification system and ensure that homes meet the requirements of the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. Notification shall be made at least 60 days prior to the implementation of such changes and with sufficient time to allow for EPA to evaluate the changes and determine if the HCO and its WACM will continue to meet the requirements of the certification system and the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*. The HCO shall notify EPA of these changes via email by contacting the WaterSense Helpline at [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov).

EPA shall evaluate revisions to the HCO's WACM using the latest version of the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*. EPA shall notify the HCO if modifications are needed to the proposed requirements or the licensing agreement between EPA and the HCO as a result of the changes.

### 9.2 EPA-Initiated Program Changes

EPA reserves the right to amend these rules of procedure, which may include issuing technical clarifications or amending or revising this certification system, the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, or the *WaterSense Technical Evaluation Process for Approving Home Certification Methods*. EPA may revise these documents independently, depending on the nature of the changes.

Revisions to the specification, certification method technical evaluation process, or this certification system can occur due to technological and/or market changes that affect the usefulness of the requirements to HCOs, builders, consumers, industry, or the environment, or to clarify requirements. EPA will only make major revisions following an open public process. This will include discussion with builders, HCOs, and other interested stakeholders regarding the changes and any transition period. Minor revisions will generally be more editorial in nature and serve to clarify requirements. EPA will notify stakeholders when revisions are considered major or minor. To facilitate version control, EPA will designate a title, version number, and date for all of the relevant documents it produces, as indicated below:

- *WaterSense Home Certification System*
- Version X.Y
- Month, Day, Year

## 10.0 For More Information

For inquiries or other questions related to this home certification system or the *WaterSense Specification for Homes*, please contact the WaterSense Helpline at (866) WTR-SENS (987-7367) or [watersense@epa.gov](mailto:watersense@epa.gov)