

SECTION 8: WORKFORCE TO ACCOMPLISH THE TRANSFORMATION

RECOMMENDATION #1: Certification of Professionals

Background

In 2005, the AB 2717 Landscape Task Force recommended “a common foundation for the education, training, and certification of landscape professionals across the disciplines involved in designing, installing, maintaining, and managing water-efficient landscapes.” The California Urban Water Conservation Council arrived at a similar conclusion by identifying the need for more workforce education in the landscape industry in their draft 2015 report on *Sustainable Landscaping: Market Transformation Framework*. During its investigative process and discussions with horticultural industry professionals and public officials the Independent Technical Panel (ITP) found a strong case for a more comprehensive education program for landscape professionals that would lead to certification.

Given the ITP’s vision to have enhanced, functional, aesthetically pleasing water wise landscapes, transforming the workforce is necessary to help accomplish this goal. One objective to meeting this goal is to enforce the recent expansion of the Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELo) to include smaller new and renovated irrigated landscape areas including thresholds that now trigger compliance needed by a much larger number of residential property owners. Design and approval of landscape designs includes aspects of site drainage that when aligned with the watershed approach (i.e., to enhance on-site rainwater infiltration), requires qualifications that need to be substantiated by an authoritative State agency or directed non-profit organization with State agency oversight. This certification is also necessary as there are health and safety considerations when designing water wise landscapes such as minimizing standing water for mosquito abatement, slope for site drainage, trip and fall hazards in public spaces, etc.

A certification program can address a critical need that is lacking in transforming California’s landscapes. Currently, approvals for MWELo are only allowable per Section [REDACTED] by qualified professionals (namely landscape architects). The ITP understands that it is now incumbent upon the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to review the eligibility criteria for approvals of landscape designs and based on Recommendation [REDACTED] in this report, if implemented, the approval of irrigation system permits. It is the ITP’s goal to also have a clearer point of entry for landscape design professionals from this certification process or another means to have their qualifications validated for participation in the MWELo and other applicable processes to aid in compliance with MWELo.

One example of a State agency program of this type is California’s Electrician Certification Program. Electricians employed by a licensed electrical contractor are required to be certified pursuant to certification standards established by the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement in the Department of Industrial Relations. Electricians must pass a test and renew their certification by completing 32 hours of continuing education every three years. Community colleges, public school districts, other public educational institutions, and approved Electrician Trainee Schools may provide this education. The Division contracts with a provider to conduct its examination program.

While the Electrician Certification Program requires electricians to be certified, not contractors or business owners, it is recommended that a State certification in water-efficient landscaping apply to business owners only and for those businesses subject to meeting MWELo requirements.

Purpose Statement

The State of California should require certification in water-efficient landscaping for all businesses that design, install, manage, audit or repair landscape irrigation systems as a means to improve industry knowledge about landscape water efficiency and to achieve better water use savings as a result.

The Independent Technical Panel Recommends That:

The State will require specific certification in water-efficient landscaping for all businesses that design, install, manage, audit and or repair landscape irrigation systems. Further, this certification shall be linked to the MWELo in its scope and continuing education units required to maintain certification.

DWR shall by 2018 (or prior to the next MWELo update cycle) complete the following actions:

1. Identify and review current certification programs and higher education program/degrees.
2. Develop metrics for evaluating current certification programs and higher education programs/degrees. Identify what is working, what is not working and where the gaps are in the certification and or degree programs.
3. Select the criteria for creating the program along with continuing education requirements needed for ongoing certification.
4. Complete a public process with other appropriate State agencies to solicit input from landscape professionals (designers, architects, and contractors), University of California, California State Universities and community colleges, non-governmental organizations, irrigation manufacturers and brokers, agencies, industry trade organizations and consultants in the certification program design process
5. Define project plan deliverables and timeline for program design, development, testing and implementation along with identifying a process to audit the program once established.
6. Work with the appropriate State agency (or contracted non-profit) to implement the certification program and update MWELo to cite this certification(s) eligible for approval of landscape planning, documentation and permits.
7. Create an online database or other references for local agencies to check to ensure that appropriate certifications are in place when enforcing MWELo.
8. Design and implement a certification program evaluation process that ensures ongoing program updates and improvements as per the MWELo update cycle.