

## SECTION 5: IMPROVEMENTS IN EXISTING LANDSCAPES

### RECOMMENDATION #1: Require Irrigation System Evaluations as Part of Home Inspections for Single-Family Residential Properties

#### Background

Each year, roughly 400,000 existing homes are put up for sale in California. Before a sale is completed, most prospective purchasers contract for a home inspection to get a professional assessment of the condition of the home and its major systems to identify any material defects. The inspector is typically on the property for a couple hours. The results of the inspection are provided to the prospective purchaser in a report that makes note of observed deficiencies, which serves to inform the purchaser before making an irrevocable commitment to purchase the property.

Home inspections offer ~~a good~~ an excellent opportunity to inform homeowners and home buyers of ~~deficiencies~~ material defects in landscape irrigation systems, and are far more numerous than all other types of landscape inspections provided by water suppliers and commercial landscape contractors. However, by one estimate, only 20% or so of home inspections include any assessment of the home's landscape irrigation system, thus missing a significant opportunity to alert homeowners to needed corrections of ~~inefficient~~ deficient irrigation systems and water waste.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that purchasers of existing homes are informed of significant deficiencies in landscape irrigation systems by requiring home inspections to include a very basic assessment of the irrigation system. Without such an evaluation, the buyer may not be aware of ~~the magnitude of~~ material defects in the irrigation system's ~~inefficiencies~~. The inspection is intended to identify gross deficiencies readily observable by a professional, rather than a deep analysis of schedules and equipment needed to optimize irrigation at the site. For a landscape irrigation inspection to be integrated with a home inspection, a high-level assessment can be accommodated while a more time-consuming, in-depth analysis cannot.

It is anticipated that inspectors, as professionals, will be able to conduct this basic inspection with some additional minor training, since they are already versed in common plumbing and electrical systems. Such training can be found in the marketplace through existing EPA Certified professional organizations such as the Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) or similar programs within the Irrigation Association. Also, a training program could be created specifically to meet the home inspection report criteria in collaboration with landscape industry trade organizations and other interested groups

This proposal imposes no new requirements on home sellers, homebuyers, realtors, lenders, or water suppliers. As with other findings in a home inspection report, the seller and buyer are under no obligation to correct any deficiency noted, but are informed with a list of matters that will require attention in the newly purchased home. The inspection report need not provide definitive expertise on irrigation, but rather simply note material defects observed in the system. The report may refer any irrigation issue to other experts for further evaluation.

#### The Independent Technical Panel Recommends That:

Legislation be enacted to amend Chapter 9.3, Division 3 [Professions and Vocations Generally] of the Business and Professions Code by adding the following new section:

\_\_\_\_\_. (a) ~~One year after the effective date of this Act~~Beginning January 1, 2019, each home inspection ~~of report on~~ a dwelling unit on a parcel containing an in-ground landscape irrigation system, the operation of which is under the exclusive control of the owner or occupant of the dwelling, shall include the following:

(1) Examination of the irrigation system controller (if present), noting defects in either installation or operation.

(2) Activation of each zone or circuit providing irrigation water to turf grass, noting defects observed in the operation of –

(A) the irrigation valve;

(B) visible irrigation supply piping;

(C) sprinkler heads and stems.

(3) During the foregoing activation of the system, observation of any of the following:

(A) irrigation spray being directed to hardscape;

(B) irrigation water leaving the irrigated area as surface runoff;

(C) ponding of irrigation water on the surface of the irrigated area.

(4) Notation if inspection is limited due to snow or ice or other site conditions that impeded an inspection.

~~(1) Examination of the irrigation system controller (if present) for functional operation and proper installation.~~

~~(2) Visual inspection of each valve/station/zone noting all visible signs of leaks — especially noting those that may cause any safety concerns (e.g. slip and fall, mold), and signs of water intrusion around the foundation.~~

~~(3) Cycling of each irrigation valve for functional operation and inspect for leaks.~~

~~(4) Inspection all of the components of overhead irrigation, noting sprinklers that are not performing properly.~~

~~(5) Operation and inspection of drip irrigation for leaks caused by blown emitters, broken fittings, and tubing leaks.~~

~~(6) Notation of each location of:~~

~~— (1) irrigation spray being directed to hardscape~~

~~— (2) irrigation water leaving the irrigated area as surface runoff~~

~~— (3) ponding of irrigation water on the surface of the irrigated area~~

~~(7) Notation if inspection is limited due to snow or ice.~~

(b) This section does not apply to any of the following:

(1) An inspection performed by a city, county, city and county, or public water supplier.

(2) An inspection performed at the direction of any court.

(3) An inspection confined solely to a landscape area.

(4) An appraisal for the purpose of preparing a report containing an estimated market value of a dwelling.