



Testimony of Dennis Realmuto,
President of the Irrigation Association of New York
Hearing on Water Quality
Senate Environmental Conservation Committee
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Chairman Thompson, members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to address the topic of water quality.

My name is Dennis Realmuto, and I am President of the Irrigation Association of New York.

The Irrigation Association of New York represents more than 80 businesses from across the state who subscribe to the principles of professional competence and good business practice in the installation and maintenance of lawn irrigation systems. We wish to address the question of how installed irrigation systems affect water quality.

Installed landscape irrigation systems have become an increasingly valuable tool for homeowners seeking to enhance the value of their property. According to the most recent figures available from the Department of Agriculture and Markets, the value of New York floriculture products was valued at \$200 million in 2005. Bedding and garden plants top the list of commodities. New York's floriculture output ranks fifth nationally. The increase in value these products furnish the homes where they are planted along with the surrounding lawn and other landscaping, is probably incalculable. But it is substantial.

In short, installed irrigation systems, are not a frivolous luxury, but an important time saving device that helps homeowners maintain and increase the value of their most important personal asset, their home.

Given the value of horticultural products grown in this state, and the role these products play in enhancing the lives and property values of millions of New Yorkers, properly installed irrigation systems are a vital investment for countless homeowners.

The emphasis here must be put on the phrase "properly installed." Installing these systems, which cost several thousand dollars apiece, is not as simple as digging a trench, laying pipes in the ground and connecting them to a water supply.

The damage resulting from improperly installed irrigation goes far beyond merely wasting water, although wasting any valuable natural resource should never be ignored. A number of other environmentally degrading conditions can result from poor irrigation practices. These include:

- Excessive runoff.
- Increased use of fertilizer, resulting in increased amounts of nitrates and phosphates in aquifers and other source water systems.
- Increased use of pesticides, because improperly irrigated plants are more susceptible to disease and insect infestation.
- Contamination of public water supply sources by pesticides.
- Excessive demand on public water supply infrastructure.
- Needless consumption of energy.
- Contamination of public drinking water supply systems through improperly installed safety equipment.

These are just the potential environmental and water quality impacts. Other considerations include such things as consumer fraud. Another is how unregulated irrigation installation may affect this state's standing under the Great Lakes Compact.

Our Association has long urged the Legislature to adopt a program requiring that professional irrigation installers be certified.

The elements of the program are simple. Professional landscape irrigation installers would be required to be certified by the Secretary of State's office. They would be required to have six months of experience and pass a written test to demonstrate they actually know what they are doing.

Given the costs of an irrigation system, this legislation would be appropriate just on consumer protection grounds, but there is far more to recommend it.

Public water supply systems are some of the biggest proponents. The Suffolk County Water Authority has developed an integrated program of organic lawn care and watering practices for homeowners. Given the increasing number of installed irrigation systems, this program is highly dependent on cooperation with technically competent irrigation installers.

Landscape irrigation can represent up to 50 percent of a typical homeowner's annual water usage. Improper installation of an irrigation system can result in wasting water as well as high water bills. Incorrect design and installation of a system can also result in cross connection problems which have the potential to contaminate the public drinking water supply for an entire neighborhood. Certification of landscape irrigation contractors will achieve the following objectives:

- Ensure the efficient and proper use of a vital natural resource.
- Enhance public health protection by eliminating cross connection problems which can have the potential to contaminate the drinking water supply.
- Provide critical customer protection measures by improving the quality and design of a landscape irrigation system thereby reducing water waste and lowering water bills.

Other signatories to the Great Lakes Compact particularly the state of Michigan have enacted similar legislation as part of its commitment to honoring the Compact. In addition, other nearby states, including New Jersey and Connecticut, have taken this step.

We urge the Legislature to join in and enact legislation to require that professional irrigation contractors be certified.

Thank you to the Committee for allowing us to submit this statement.