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Ewing Welcomes Water Conservation Advocate to Speak at Quarterly Meeting

May 30, 2007, Phoenix, AZ—During their quarterly meeting held in Phoenix on May 18, Ewing Irrigation opened the floor to Amy Vickers, Massachusetts-based engineer, author, and water conservation consultant, to speak on the irrigation industry's crucial role in water conservation.

Widely-known for her strong opinions on environmental issues as they pertain to water conservation, Vickers has stirred the debate throughout the green industry by issuing such commentary as “the biggest drinking problem in America is not alcohol but lawn watering” and “the widespread proliferation of residential automatic irrigation systems is the main culprit behind the profligate volumes of water being applied to lawns and landscapes.” So why did Ewing Irrigation invite Vickers to speak?

“As the issue of water scarcity continues to gain momentum, understanding the views of those who challenge the green industry as a group of excessive water-users is essential to our success,” stated Douglas York, President of Ewing Irrigation. “We are grateful to Amy Vickers for offering our employees her perspective, and fully intend to continue strengthening our efforts to educate our employees, contractors, and end-users about the importance of proper water management.”

Her passion for water developed when she was working for the New York City Department of Environmental Protection's Hazardous Materials Response Unit and an emergency arose concerning a lethal substance thought to be contaminating a reservoir supplying the city. Though the city resolved the issue, one thought pressed on in her mind: The role of water is first and foremost for the health and safety of the public. Today, this mindset guides her views on water conservation.

In her opening remarks to more than 300 Ewing employees representing 19 states from Washington to Florida, Vickers, who wrote, “Handbook of Water Use and Conservation” (WaterPlow Press, 2001), and has had her opinions on landscape irrigation published in the Journal AWWA, a publication of the American Water Works Association, said, “I am not saying no to irrigation, I am saying we have to get realistic about efficient watering.”

As the population is expected to increase over 30 percent to more than 400 million by 2050, Vickers indicated we have to find a way to accommodate for our country's growth, and promote the essential understanding that water is not a global issue, rather site specific to each localized water supply.

Armed with statistics showing the decrease in indoor home water use juxtaposed with the increase in outdoor home water use, she supports several stringent lawn watering measures that some water suppliers and communities have already enacted: limiting the number of watering days per week (or even month), reducing the area allowed for irrigation by restricting the square footage allowed for turf, upgrading Xeriscape principles, ceasing "watering-in" practices for fertilizers and chemical applications, and promoting irrigation by rainwater only.

Equally important to these measures, Vickers highlights opportunities for the irrigation industry in a water-short future. She believes the irrigation industry needs to be more scrutinous in the hiring of skilled professionals to purvey quality landscape and irrigation design in tune with local water conditions.

"When there is constant overspray and runoff from landscapes, it shows the industry is not policing themselves and is excessive and careless in their water use," said Vickers, adding that if these problems persist, she believes the government will step in and start regulating outdoor water use.

To advance the irrigation industry, Vickers urged industry professionals to focus on education while continuing to build constructive and profitable relationships with water utilities, government, and NGOs. From helping water districts enact rebate programs, to getting involved in drought task force programs, there are ways to spread water conservation awareness to professionals and end users.

"Amy addressed several critical points as they pertain to water conservation and education in our industry, which reinforces our efforts to further promote water-efficient products and practices," said Warren Gorowitz, National Water Management Products Sales Manager for Ewing Irrigation. "She calls for swift, critical action, and we agree; it's time for our industry to take the lead on this issue."

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