

A Consumer's Guide to Backflow Prevention in Texas

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality requires all public water systems to maintain a cross-connection control program that protects the distribution system delivering drinking water to your home or business.

A cross-connection control program includes:

- An inspection of the customer's private plumbing to identify and prevent cross-connections and potential contamination, including contamination from high lead levels in the plumbing.
- Installation and testing of backflow-prevention assemblies, where required.
- Rules to prevent cross-connections and unacceptable plumbing practices—ordinances, regulations, service agreements, and a plumbing code.

Some public water systems may have more stringent requirements than the TCEQ. TCEQ regulations are the minimum requirement.

What is a cross-connection?

A physical connection between potable water and an actual or potential contamination hazard that could make the water unsafe to drink. Wherever there is a cross-connection, there is a potential threat to public health from contaminants.

What is backflow?

Water flowing in the opposite of its intended direction, either from a loss of pressure in the supply lines or an increase in pressure on the customer's side. When the water backflows it can carry contaminants with it into the water lines.

Common cross-connections:

- ◆ *Garden hose:* Backflow can occur at your home if you leave a garden hose turned on and submerged in a swimming pool, insert it into your car's radiator to flush out the antifreeze, or attach it to an insecticide sprayer. That material could siphon back into your potable water.
- ◆ *Private well:* Backflow can also occur from an untreated water supply, such as a private well, if the well plumbing is connected to the potable-water-supply plumbing. The untreated water could be pumped into the potable-water supply serving your home and into the public water system.
- ◆ *Lawn sprinkler system:* TCEQ regulations require that all lawn sprinkler systems be connected through a backflow-prevention assembly—without which, the stagnant water, and anything in it, from the sprinkler system could be drawn into the potable-water supply for your home.

How can backflow be prevented?

Backflow into a potable-water system can be prevented by using a backflow-prevention assembly, or an air gap, which is a physical separation between the water supply and a potential source of pollution. Licensed professionals as well as your public water system are responsible for determining the type of backflow-prevention assembly required, based on the degree of hazard.

Testing backflow-prevention assemblies

Because backflow-prevention assemblies are mechanical assemblies that can fail, the TCEQ requires testing of all backflow-prevention assemblies at installation by a TCEQ-licensed tester. Backflow-prevention assemblies installed to protect against any health hazard must be tested annually.

How can I find out more information about backflow?

For more information about backflow and cross-connection control, visit <www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/cc>.

www.tceq.texas.gov/publications/gi/gi-411.html



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