

Cross-Connection Control and Backflow Prevention

FORU Customer FAQs



****PLEASE NOTE THAT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A CROSS-CONNECTION CONTROL AND BACKFLOW PREVENTION PROGRAM IS CURRENTLY PROPOSED****

Proposed Dates of City Council Meetings:

1st Reading of Ordinance – April 18, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.

2nd Reading of Ordinance – May 2, 2019 at 9:30 a.m.

Q. Why is the City proposing the implementation of a Cross-Connection Control and Backflow Prevention program?

A. 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. The City is dedicated to ensuring that Fair Oaks Ranch Utility public water supply is safe and protected!

Q. What is a cross-connection?

A. According to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (“TCEQ”), a cross-connection is “a physical connection between drinkable water and a liquid or gas that could make the water unsafe to drink.” Wherever there is a cross connection, there is a potential threat to public health from contaminants. Examples of some common cross-connections are fire sprinkler systems, lawn irrigation systems, and carbonated fountain drink machines.

Q. What is backflow?

A. Backflow is 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.

Q. How does backflow occur?

A. Backflow is usually caused by back-pressure or backsiphonage. Back-pressure is when the water pressure within a customer’s plumbing system exceeds the pressure of the water distribution system supplying the water. Backsiphonage is caused by negative pressure from a vacuum (or partial vacuum) in the supply piping, just as drinking through a straw draws liquid from a glass. Backflow prevention assemblies are designed to protect the public water system from these types of concerns.

Q. What is a non-health hazard?

A. A non-health hazard is an actual or potential threat of pollution to the public water system by an aesthetically objectionable but non-toxic substance.

Q. What is a health hazard?

A. A health hazard is an actual or potential threat of contamination to the public water system that would present a threat to the health of the consumer.

Q. How often must a backflow prevention assembly be tested?

A. Testing frequency depends on the hazard the assembly protects against. Backflow prevention assemblies installed to protect against any health hazard must be tested annually (per state code) by a backflow prevention assembly tester (“BPAT”). Assemblies installed to protect against non-health hazards are subject to a testing frequency determined by the City. Testing frequency will be included in proposed ordinance.

Q. What are common examples of health hazards in the City of Fair Oaks Ranch?

A. Common examples include irrigation systems with chemical additives, irrigation systems located on properties with a septic tank, commercial car washes, fire sprinkler systems, and reclaimed water systems.

Q. What are common examples of non-health hazards in the City of Fair Oaks Ranch?

A. The most common example in Fair Oaks Ranch are irrigation systems without chemical additives.

Q. Why is the City proposing periodic testing for backflow prevention assemblies that protect against non-health hazards?

A. Backflow prevention assemblies have internal seals, springs, and moving parts that wear out. Regular testing is highly recommended by the TCEQ, as well as required by the City's currently adopted plumbing code, to ensure assemblies are functioning properly and have not been bypassed.

Q. I have a lawn irrigation system that was installed before backflow prevention assemblies were mandatory. Do I need an assembly installed or am I "grandfathered" in?

A. All hazards must be isolated from the public water supply regardless of when the hazard was first created or the site constructed. There are no "grandfather" clauses that apply to cross-connection control.

Q. I do not know the location of my backflow prevention assembly. What do I do now?

A. Please contact the City's Environmental Compliance Manager at (210) 698-0900.

Q. Will the City be contracting with a third-party data management system?

A. Yes! A proposed service agreement with Vepo, LLC will be recommended for approval by City Council on April 18, 2019. Vepo, LLC is an online backflow management system that receives and tracks test and maintenance reports and handles registration of backflow prevention assembly testers. The system is at no cost to the City.

Q. How can I find a certified backflow prevention assembly tester?

A. Upon request, the City can provide a list of registered testers. A link will also be added to the City's Cross-Connection Control and Backflow Prevention webpage upon program approval.

Q. Can the City receive a special rate for assembly testing?

A. City staff has explored the option of contracting with a third-party company for testing purposes. The City's recommendation is for property owners to hire a certified tester of their choice at a rate they are comfortable with. Be sure to ask your tester about any group rates or specials that may be available.

Q. I received a letter about having my backflow prevention assembly tested. What do I do now?

A. Since the backflow prevention assembly is a fixture of your private plumbing system, you as the property owner are responsible for the periodic testing and/or repairs of the assembly. You will need to hire a certified BPAT to perform the test. The tester will then submit the test and maintenance report to Vepo, LLC within ten (10) business days. If you are a renter and you are not responsible for the maintenance plumbing of that property then you will need to forward the letter to your landlord.

Q. I have multiple backflow prevention assemblies on my property, do I need to have each tested?

A. Yes, each assembly must be tested separately by a certified BPAT.

Q. What if my backflow prevention assembly fails the test?

A. If an assembly fails the test, the property owner must have it repaired or replaced AND retested by a certified BPAT. If the assembly cannot be repaired and a replacement is necessary, a permit from the Building Department is required.

Q. What happens if I do not have my assembly tested?

A. If a FORU customer decides not to have their “in use” backflow prevention assembly tested, proposed enforcement includes the discontinuation of water services until compliance is met and/or a possible fine.