

Residential Irrigation Backflow Q & A

To protect the City of Concord's water system, Concord's Backflow/ Cross Connection Control Ordinance requires that all single-family residential irrigation customers to have an approved backflow prevention device assembly installed and tested annually.

Question: My irrigation system has been installed for many years and this is the first time I have received a letter. How did the City know I had a residential irrigation system?

Answer: The City's System Protection Superintendent performs inspections to identify if an irrigation system is present (i.e. very green grass, backflow prevention device, sprinkler heads or irrigation valve boxes).

Question: My neighbor has a lawn irrigation system, but hasn't received a letter. Why?

Answer: The City's System Protection Superintendent's personnel do regular inspections to identify lawn irrigation systems. However, some irrigation systems may not be highly visible. If the System Protection Superintendent receives information (an address or name), their personnel will conduct a closer inspection to verify the presence of an irrigation system and will update the City's database. As always, your information will not be mentioned when notifying another resident.

Question: Is the Backflow/Cross Connection Control Program a new requirement?

Answer: The City has had this requirement since 1994, when they first began enforcement of this requirement with both commercial and industrial water customers. All commercial and industrial water services were required to have backflow prevention devices on their basic water service, as well as their in-ground irrigation systems and fire lines. The City began moving forward with this requirement for residential irrigation systems in 1994. The current Backflow Prevention manual was revised on February 14, 2007.

Question: Why is annual testing required?

Answer: Annual testing is required to ensure that the existing/required backflow prevention device is functioning properly. Mechanical backflow preventers are assemblies with springs and moving parts and are used in situations where an air gap cannot be used. Over time and continuous wear, these assemblies will fail and/or need parts replaced. When an assembly fails, it is no longer preventing backflow from occurring. Annual testing and inspection ensures that the assemblies are certified and kept in working condition.

Question: Before moving to the City of Concord, I lived in an area that did not enforce annual testing for backflow prevention devices on lawn irrigation systems, so why does the City?

Answer: Lawn irrigation systems are considered "high risk" cross-connections because a backflow incident could introduce fertilizers, pesticides, and other lawn chemicals into the City's drinking water system; not to mention tiny insects and animal waste. To prevent this from happening and keeping the City's drinking water system safe, the City adopted requirements to ensure safe, quality drinking water that is free from any contamination.

Question: Who is responsible for making sure the backflow prevention device is tested?

Answer: The property owner is responsible to have the backflow prevention device tested on time. The water purveyor (City of Concord) is tasked by state law to maintain the records of backflow preventers and to make sure testing is done annually.

Question: Who can test backflow preventer devices?

Answer: Only a certified backflow tester can test backflow preventers.

Question: Where can I find a certified tester and how much does it cost?

Answer: Most local plumbing, utility contractors and irrigation contractors have certified testers who can perform the test on a backflow prevention device. There is a list of certified testers shown on the City's website; however, if you would like to use a tester that is not on the referenced list, be sure they are in fact certified. The City of Concord does not recommend or endorse any particular company or tester, and the list of certified testers is provided as a convenience to our customers only. Customers are advised to perform their own due diligence before hiring someone to complete testing on their backflow prevention device.

Question: My lawn irrigation system is currently "inactive" do I still need to have a backflow prevention device on my irrigation service line and have it tested annually?

Answer: If the irrigation service line is only turned off at the valve, a backflow prevention device and corresponding annual test is required. If the irrigation service line is permanently disconnected from the City's water supply, see the next question.

Question: My lawn irrigation system has been disconnected and/or the meter removed what do I need to do?

Answer: An annual inspection will need to take place to ensure the lawn irrigation system is disconnected and capped off. You will need to contact one of the City's System Protection Inspectors at either (704)-920-5727 or (704) 920-5347 to schedule the inspection. Once the inspection has been completed, the City's records will be updated.

Question: I don't want to use my sprinkler system anymore. What can I do so I don't need to have a backflow preventer or have it tested annually?

Answer: If you discontinue the use of a lawn irrigation system, you will have the option to remove a separate irrigation meter at no cost; please call a City Customer Care professional at (704) 920-5555 to make your request. If you do not have a irrigation separate meter, you can contact a licensed plumber and/or irrigation contractor to disable and cap off the irrigation service line below grade. In addition, this action requires a plumbing permit and follow-up inspection done by a Cabarrus County plumbing inspector to ensure the work performed meets North Carolina (NC) Plumbing Code.

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