



OPU Cross Connection & Backflow Prevention Program
As It Relates to Residential In-Ground Irrigation Systems

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long has this policy been in place? The Owatonna Public Utilities Commission adopted the policy effective January 1, 2008.

Why does OPU have this policy? State and federal regulations require OPU to have a cross-connection and backflow prevention program in place to insure that your water quality is not compromised through cross-connection contamination.

Who must comply to this policy? For residential customers, every property owner that has an in-ground irrigation system. Commercial and industrial customers have many more requirements on where they must install and maintain backflow prevention devices due to additional hazards involved with the process of their products.

What is a cross-connection? A cross connection is any connection between a public water system (potable) and any source or system containing non-potable water or other substances. In the case of in-ground irrigation systems, the risk of contamination is from stagnant water, fertilizers, and lawn chemicals.

What is backflow? Backflow is the undesirable reversal of flow of non potable water, contaminants or other substances through a cross connection into the piping of a public water system. Unusual conditions such as stoppage of water due to a break in a water main may cause backflow. Although occurrences are rare, the effect on health and safety can be severe.

What is a backflow prevention assembly? As the name implies, a backflow prevention assembly is a mechanism designed to prevent backflow. This device is installed to prevent the contamination of the public water supply when conditions for a backflow exist. The most common backflow prevention devices installed on irrigation systems are a Pressure Vacuum Breaker (PVB) or a Reduced Pressure Zone (RPZ) device.

Why do backflow prevention assemblies need to be periodically tested? Mechanical backflow prevention devices have internal seals, springs, and moving parts that are subject to fouling, wear, and fatigue. Therefore, they must be tested periodically, using calibrated equipment, to assure they are functioning properly. The Minnesota Plumbing Code requires that these devices be tested annually, and Minnesota state law requires OPU to enforce this requirement.

Can I perform the test myself? No, state law requires that the testing be performed by a tester or licensed plumber that is specifically accredited for dealing with backflow prevention devices. The professional that performs the testing must be registered with OPU. OPU maintains a list of registered testers which is available to customers upon request.

How much will it cost to have the backflow prevention assembly tested? Expect to pay between \$50 and \$80 for the testing.

When should I have my backflow prevention device tested? You MUST test the device at the time of your system start-up. If the system is shut down after it has been pressurized and tested with start-up, it must be retested, as the test would no longer be valid or accurate after it was shut down.

What do I do after the test has been completed? The person that completes the test is required to forward the test results to OPU upon completion. You should still request a copy of the completed test form for your records from your contractor.

What if I choose not to comply? Due to the serious nature of protecting the public water supply, a fee structure for non-compliance is in effect. Ultimately, OPU may terminate your water supply for non-compliance. For more specific details, please refer to the OPU Cross Connection and Backflow Prevention Program available at www.owatonnautilities.com

Is OPU profiting from this? No, this program is an unfunded mandate through state and federal water quality requirements. The administration of this program is costing OPU money, but we are not charging any customer directly for administering this program.

Who can I speak with if I have additional questions?

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