# Frequently Asked Questions about Backflow Prevention

***What is a cross-connection?***

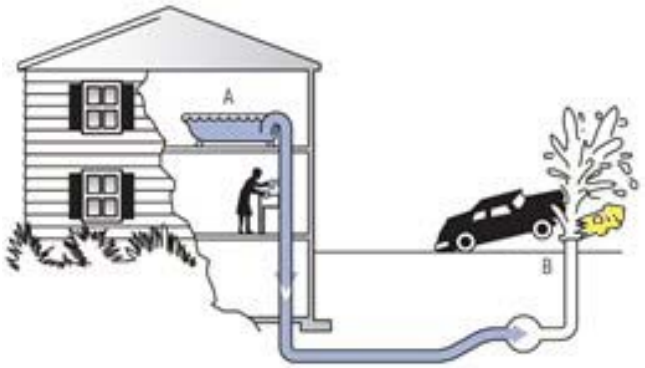
A cross-connection is an actual or potential connection between a public or consumer's drinking water system and a non-potable (non-drinkable) source of water or other fluid. Examples of cross-connections are the connections between the drinking water distribution system and irrigation or lawn sprinkler systems, hose bibs, fire sprinkler systems, carbonation units, boilers, and chemical feed equipment. Cross-connections are generally categorized as either low hazard (affecting taste and odor but not causing a health hazard) or high hazard (posing a risk to public health).

***What is backflow?***

Under normal conditions, water from the distribution system flows into a consumer's premises. When backflow occurs, water flows from the consumer's premises back into the distribution system. If that water is contaminated, it can carry pollutants into the distribution system, which can cause illness or even death.

***How does backflow occur?***

Backflow into the public water distribution system can occur when the water pressure in a consumer's premises is higher than the pressure in the water distribution system. This condition can be caused by a drop-in water pressure in the distribution system (for example, because of firefighting or a break in a water main) or by the presence of within the consumer's premises that operate at higher pressures than that of the distribution system (for example, commercial boilers, steam heating systems, irrigation systems or fountain beverage dispensers).



***What is a backflow prevention assembly?***

A backflow prevention assembly is a mechanical device that prevents water from flowing backwards. There are several types of backflow prevention assemblies: reduced pressure principle assembly (RP), double-check valve assembly (DCVA), spill resistant vacuum breaker assembly (SRB), and pressure vacuum breaker assembly (PVB). All four assemblies are testable. The degree of hazard determines which type of assembly to use.

***How often must a backflow prevention assembly be tested?***

Assemblies must be tested once a year. Owatonna Public Utilities will send you a notice at the beginning of the month in which your test is due.

***Who is responsible for arranging the testing of a backflow assembly?***

The customer on record (that is, the entity to whom the water bill is addressed) is responsible for arranging the testing.

***Where can I find an approved tester?***

You can any local plumber and ask them if they have an approved backflow assembly tester. Most plumbing companies have one or more that are approved. Owatonna Public Utilities likes to leave this option open to the customer so they can pick who and what works best for them.

***Who is responsible for submitting test results to Owatonna Public Utilities?***

The tester is responsible for sending test results into Owatonna Public Utilities Backflow Program. Test results must be submitted within seven calendar days of the test date. Test results can be submitted on the proper form to: Owatonna Public Utilities, ATTN: Cross Connection Control, 208 S. Walnut Ave, PO Box 800 Owatonna, MN 55060.

***What if my backflow prevention assembly fails the test?***

If an assembly fails, the tester must contact the owner and get approval to try and repair the assembly and then retest it. If the assembly cannot be repaired, it must be replaced, then tested. Replacement and repair must be done by a licensed master plumber or licensed journeyman plumber under the supervision of a master plumber (MN Statue 326.40) in addition to being an ASSE 5130 accredited backflow prevention assembly repairer.

***I have several backflow prevention assemblies with different test dates: How can I get them tested at the same time?***

If you would like to synchronize the test dates for several assemblies on different water meters, contact a certified plumber and they can do that. Please be aware that, in the first year, synchronization could result in some tests being due less than 12 months after the previous test.

***What regulations authorize Owatonna Public Utilities cross-connection program?***

Cross-connection control is required by federal, state and local regulations, as summarized below:

-Federal: Safe Drinking Water Act (1974, amended 1986 and 1996) and Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1986.

-Sate: Minnesota Department of Health, cross-contamination, backflow and cross-connection.

-Local: Owatonna Public Utilities, specifications for cross-connection and backflow prevention (section C5.0)

***Where can I get additional information?***

Additional information can be obtained by calling Owatonna Public Utilities Cross Connection Control Program at (507) 451-2480 Ext: 5483 between 7am and 4pm. Also on the Owatonna Public Utilities website under safety.