

TCPUD Backflow Prevention Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a "cross-connection"?

A cross-connection is a connection between a public water system or consumer's potable (drinking) water system and any source or system containing non-potable water or other substances.

Q: What is "backflow"?

Backflow is the flow of non-potable water or other substances through a cross-connection and into the piping of a public water system or consumer's potable water system.

Q: What is a backflow prevention assembly?

A backflow prevention assembly is a mechanical device installed on your private property after the water meter. It prevents water already in your property pipes from "backflowing" into the District's water system, possibly contaminating the District's potable water system.

Q: Are there different types of backflow prevention assemblies?

Yes, there are several different types of backflow preventers:

- Air Gap (AG)
- Reduced Pressure Backflow Prevention Assembly (RP)
- Double Check Backflow Prevention Assembly (DC)
- Pressure Vacuum Breaker (PVB)
- Atmospheric Vacuum Breaker (AVB)
- Spill-Proof Pressure Vacuum Breaker (SVB)

The Tahoe City Public Utility District recognizes all of these as acceptable forms of cross-connection control. However, each assembly must be approved prior to installation to ensure that the right assembly is being installed for the particular application.

Q: How do I know which assembly I need?

The District can tell you which assembly is appropriate for your particular need. You may choose the model from a list of approved assemblies available at the District office.

Q: Why must I install a backflow prevention assembly?

The California Department of Health Services requires the District to eliminate cross-connections by maintaining a cross-connection control program. The program mandates the installation of backflow prevention assemblies by the consumer where the District determines they are needed, in accordance with District Ordinance 185.

Q: Who can install and test the assembly?

Only backflow prevention assembly testers holding current certification by the California-Nevada Section of the American Water Works Association can test, maintain and repair backflow prevention assemblies. The tester must provide the District with evidence of the AWWA certification and proof that the test equipment he or she will use is currently calibrated. The District maintains a [list of currently approved testers](#).

Q: My backflow preventer is installed. Now what?

A District-approved, Certified Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester must test the assembly. The certified tester will test your new backflow prevention assembly to ensure that it works and will then complete the District's Backflow Prevention Installation and Test form, the form you receive when you obtained a permit from the District. The Installation and Test form will be given to you from the Certified Tester. You must sign the bottom portion of the form (Assembly Owner Signature), make a copy for your records and mail, fax or email the completed form to:

Tahoe City Public Utility District
P.O. Box 5249
Tahoe City, CA 96145
Fax (530) 581-1468

Q: What kinds of hazards do appropriate backflow assemblies prevent?

Backflow prevention controls two types of hazards: pollution and contamination of your drinking water supply. A pollutant is any substance which affects the color or odor of the water, but does not pose a health hazard. A contaminant causes illness or death when ingested.

Q: Why do I have to test my backflow preventer every year?

To ensure that the device is functioning properly. With the exception of the air gap, backflow preventers are mechanical units that have internal seals, springs, and moving parts that are subject to fouling, wear, or fatigue. The annual test ensures a properly functioning assembly, and certifies that the assembly has not been removed or had a by-pass line installed around it. Air gaps may be tested by conducting a visual inspection.

Q: Does my backflow preventer have to be installed immediately behind my meter?

No, but that is the preferred location. The backflow prevention assembly must be installed on private property. If the assembly cannot be installed immediately behind the meter, the District will allow the owner to install the assembly at a location within the property, approved by the District. There can be no connections to the water line between the meter and the assembly.

Q: Can my backflow preventer be installed in an underground box or vault?

Backflow prevention assemblies are designed to be installed above ground. Because of our severe winters, on an individual basis we may approve the installation of a double-check assembly within an underground box. RPs and vacuum breakers may never be installed in a box or vault. This would subject the assembly to becoming submerged in the underground box or vault, rendering it useless.

Q: What happens if I don't install a required backflow preventer?

Failure to install the required type of assembly could result in termination of water service as indicated in the District's Water Ordinance 185. The District will work with you to ensure that you are able to install the assembly.

Q: How do I get a copy of the District's test form?

Click on this link: [TCPUD Backflow Prevention Assembly Test Report \(Jan 2008\)](#), call the District at (530) 583-3796, extension 32 and request that a copy be emailed, faxed or mailed to you, or stop by the office to pick one up.

Q: Do I need to install a backflow preventer on my residential irrigation system?

Yes, even if it is a drip irrigation system. Weed killers, fertilizers and animal waste may enter the water supply through an irrigation system that is not properly protected with a backflow prevention assembly. District staff will help you determine what assembly is the right one for your particular needs.

Q: Does a fire sprinkler system need a backflow prevention assembly?

Yes. In our cold climate, fire sprinkler systems are frequently charged with glycol solution. Even systems that are charged only with water may be hazardous to the water supply. Bacterial growth can occur in the stagnant water, which sits undisturbed in the pipes for many years. A loss of system pressure can draw this polluted or contaminated water into your own system and potentially into the District's water supply.

Q: Can my backflow prevention assembly freeze?

Yes! Backflow prevention assemblies, particularly irrigation assemblies, will freeze if left exposed. They must be kept from freezing by providing insulation and by providing a heat source, if needed. Irrigation assemblies may be installed with unions that allow them to be removed during the winter months. Other assemblies can often be installed within the home in a heated area. District staff will help determine what location is appropriate for the assembly. We will endeavor to allow you to install the assembly within the home.

Q: How do I know when my backflow prevention assembly needs to be checked?

The District maintains a database containing all of the permitted backflow assemblies within our water system. We will notify you when your assembly is due to be tested, and we will provide you with a test form accompanied by a list of certified backflow prevention assembly testers. It is the customer's responsibility to schedule the test.

Q: Is the Tahoe City Public Utility District required to comply with these same regulations?

Yes. The District owns and maintains 53 backflow prevention assemblies throughout Tahoe City. We test all irrigation assemblies prior to first use each season.