



WATER MAINTENANCE DIVISION

333 Burgess Drive / Menlo Park, CA 94025

(650) 330-6780 / Fax (650) 327-1953

Cross-Connection Control Program

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is a Cross-connection?

A cross connection is a connection or potential connection between the City's drinking water system and any other system or environment that may contain harmful or objectionable substances that could possibly enter the drinking water system. The water department has the authority to prevent contamination of the public water system by requiring customers with cross-connections to install and regularly test devices that prevent "backflow."

2. What is backflow?

Backflow is the undesirable reverse flow of non-drinking water back into a drinking water system. It is caused when a pressure differential exists between the public distribution system and a private customer's piping system. Pressure differentials can occur during fire fighting or main flushing and on private property during various industrial and commercial processes.

3. What are some examples of cross-connections that would require installation of a backflow prevention assembly?

Examples of potential cross-connections include irrigation systems, dry cleaners, chemical-or biological-processes, water used for manufacturing, water used in laboratories, auxiliary water supplies (wells or tanker trucks), and some fire service lines.

4. Why do I have to install a new assembly?

Backflow prevention assemblies serve to protect the public water system from actual or potential contaminants or pollution that might enter the drinking water whenever the pressure in the City's system becomes less than the pressure in a system on private property. The [California Code of Regulations](#), Title 17, Div. 1, Chapter 5, Subchapter 1, Group 4, Article 1, outlines the requirements.

5. Why must the new assembly be installed at the meter?

The City requires an assembly at the meter for two reasons. The first is to prevent water district personnel from having to disrupt business on-site. If there is no assembly at the meter, then the City is required to inspect the premises on an annual basis to ensure that the piping system has not changed from the previous year and that there are assemblies on-site to protect the public system from any industrial process, irrigation or fire system. The City must also check that there is a tag on each on-site assembly to ensure that it has been tested within the last year. The time that it would take to complete this task would use up staff time unnecessarily and take away from time needed to operate and maintain the public distribution system.

The second reason is that if the assembly is not installed at the meter, the potential for additional cross-connections could exist. A future water user could tap into the line between the meter and the backflow assembly, rendering the assembly useless in protecting the public water supply. When there is a assembly at the meter, and no additional connections exist between the meter and the assembly the City's liability for protecting the public water supply terminates at the meter and the cross-connection control program is more easily enforced.

6. What if I do not install a backflow assembly at the meter?

Failure to comply may result in the discontinuance or the customer's water service. The San Mateo County Code, 4.72.120, also provides for penalties of \$50 or more per day for cross-connection control violations.

7. Why must the backflow assembly be tested every year?

The State Department of Public Health (formerly Department of Health Services) requires that all backflow prevention assemblies be tested annually. This rule appears in the [California Code of Regulations](#), Title 17, Div. 1, Chapter 5, Subchapter 1, Group 4, Article 2, §7605(c) The City may require that some assemblies in higher risk areas be tested more frequently.

8. Who may test a backflow assembly?

The City of Menlo Park provides a list of [certified testers](#) to customers in need of testing of their backflow prevention assembly. In order to be listed, the tester needs to show the City proof that they are certified with CA-NV AWWA and provide records annually of the calibration of their gage equipment. It is the tester's responsibility to maintain certification and gage calibration in order to be listed on the City of Menlo Park's certified testers list. This list is revised every six months.

9. Why can't a regular plumber test my backflow assembly?

Not all plumbers are certified to test backflow prevention assemblies. Those who have acquired proper training to be certified testers can test the backflow prevention assemblies. The City maintains a list of [certified testers](#).

10. How much will it cost to have a backflow assembly tested?

Each tester's fee varies. It is recommended that the customer obtain at least three price quotes from various testers before hiring one. The tester must purchase a backflow history tag and attach it to the assembly when it is tested. Tags cost \$10.00 per assembly.

11. What particular brands and models of backflow assemblies are allowed?

The City of Menlo Park relies upon the University of Southern California Foundation for Cross-Connection Control and Hydraulic Research (USC-FCCCHR) to maintain a list of approved assemblies. A member of USC-FCCCHR may access the full list online; otherwise, contact the City at (650) 330-6780, who will check whether the proposed assembly is on the list.

12. Why do I have to install a concrete pad under the new assembly?

A concrete pad will enhance the stability of the assembly, eliminate the growth of vegetation under the assembly and facilitate access to the assembly for annual testing. On a case by case basis, depending upon the location of installation and other factors, the City may waive this requirement. See the City's [Standard Details](#) WA-20 or WA-24 for pad requirements.

13. Why do I have to install a cage around the backflow assembly?

A cage is recommended to prevent theft, to improve the aesthetics of the assembly and to protect it from being hit by vehicles. See the City's [Standard Details](#) WA-21 for cage requirements.

14. How do I know if the assembly is installed properly?

See the City of Menlo Park [Standard Details](#) WA-20 or WA-24 for installation requirements. Strict requirements are established for height and distance away from structures. Make sure the plumber who is installing the assembly has a copy of this drawing and has obtained a plumbing permit from the City Building Division at (650) 330-6704 before installing the assembly.

15. Where can certified testers purchase tags showing proof of testing?

Testers may purchase tags for \$20 at the City of Menlo Park Corp Yard at 333 Burgess Drive, (650) 330-6780. Tags are good for three years; however the assembly must still be tested annually.

16. How can a certified backflow tester's name be added to the City's approved-tester list?

Provide the tester's certification and most recent annual calibration report to the City's Cross-Connection Control Specialist. If approved, she will begin accepting test reports from that tester. The Tester's name will be added to the approved tester list when it is updated the next time. The list is updated in the following June or January.

17. Who do I call for further questions?

The City's Cross-Connection Control Specialist is Julie Robinson at (650) 330-6780. Some questions may also be answered by engineering staff at (650) 330-6740.