



Backflow Frequently Asked Questions

What is "backflow"?

Backflow is the unwanted flow of non-potable substances back into the consumer's plumbing system and/or public water system (i.e., drinking water). Backflow, to a certain degree, occurs continuously in every public water and/or plumbing system.

When backflow occurs, water is flowing in the opposite direction from its normal flow. With the direction of flow reversed, due to a change in pressures, backflow can allow contaminants to enter the drinking water system through cross-connections.

A potentially hazardous cross-connection occurs every time someone uses a garden hose sprayer to apply insecticides or herbicides to their lawn. Another cross-connection occurs when someone uses their garden hose to clear a stoppage in their sewer line.

Without a backflow prevention device between your hose and hose bib (spigot or outside faucet), the contents of the hose and anything it is connected to can backflow into the piping system and could possibly contaminate the drinking water.

Backflows due to cross-connections are serious plumbing problems. However, they can be avoided by the use of proper protection devices. Each spigot at your home should have a hose-bib vacuum breaker installed. This is a simple, inexpensive device that can be purchased at any plumbing or hardware store. Installation is as easy as attaching your garden hose to a spigot.

There are two types of backflow: back-siphonage and backpressure. Backsiphonage is caused by a negative pressure in the supply line to a facility or plumbing fixture. Backsiphonage may occur during waterline breaks, when repairs are made to the waterlines, or when shutting off the water supply, etc. Backpressure can occur when the potable water supply is connected to another system operated at a higher pressure or has the ability to create pressure, etc. Common causes are booster pumps, pressure vessels, elevated plumbing, etc.

What is a Backflow Preventer?

Backflow Preventers are mechanical devices designed to prevent backflow through cross connections. However, for backflow preventers to protect as designed, they must meet stringent installation requirements.