

Cross Connection Control

James Probst, Chair

Indiana AWWA Backflow / Cross Connection Control Committee

The importance of backflow tester education

We put our lives in the hands of many individuals every day without even giving it a second thought, such as doctors, airline pilots, police firemen and many more than you even realize. But what about our water professionals who keep drinking water safe for human consumption? One of those groups working behind the scenes you rarely think of as protecting public safety are backflow testers.

So, **how are backflow testers important to your well-being?** Well, testers need to properly perform the testing of backflow assemblies. If they pass a backflow assembly that actually failed, it could result in a contamination incident. When backflow incidents occur, they often cause sickness and even death to humans. I have investigated several incidents resulting from backflow contamination.

What helps ensure backflow testers are able to perform their backflow testing responsibilities correctly? In my opinion, it's essential to provide proper backflow training during the initial tester certification and also during recurrent training. Not all backflow schools are equal in the type of education they provide. A real need for government oversight is often required to ensure proper instruction standards are being properly taught. You also want to ensure students are being properly evaluated on their backflow tester and cross connection control knowledge.

As an instructor for backflow tester certification in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, plus having my national instructor backflow certification, you need only ask my students the importance I place on learning proper backflow testing regulations, using the backflow testing gauge, understanding testing procedures, knowing installation requirements, conducting on-site inspections, running a cross connection control program, learning federal and state regulations, and understanding backflow assembly troubleshooting techniques.

Does that sound like a lot? It is, but if you don't understand how the backflow assembly works hydraulically, mechanically, and all the regulations surrounding cross connection control, then **how can you test a backflow assembly properly to ensure it is operating correctly to provide adequate protection?**

I feel many schools make the mistake of teaching step-by-step procedures to students. The problem with this method is students are just going through the motions and they really don't have an understanding of what they're doing.

An important part of being a backflow tester is understanding the ways in which terrorists may attack our water distribution systems. For many years, terrorists have had aspirational interest in contaminating our drinking water system through backflow contamination. When teaching students, I instruct them on what to look for to help prevent terrorist acts.

The bottom line is, continuing educational requirements would help ensure testers know what they're doing and the important role they play in protecting the public water supply. That is why we are hopeful this year that continuing educational requirements will be adopted in Indiana as they already have been in surrounding states.