

Do You Need Backflow Prevention, Cross Connection Control Training?

In the past several months I have had the opportunity to facilitate several backflow prevention and cross connection control courses sponsored by KRWA. It occurred to me that every system would benefit from taking this course. Even if you as a system operator, manager or administrator are not interested in becoming a certified backflow prevention technician, there is a lot of good information to take away from this class.

I have been certified as an inspector/tester since 1992. I took my original training from Al Hermsen who worked with KRWA on scores and scores of cross connection/backflow prevention training event. Al was a pioneer in backflow prevention in Kansas. He started many people thinking about ways to protect our most precious resource. He trained KRWA's current instructor Terry Randles and countless others. Terry still uses much of the informational material that Al originally developed. Why reinvent the wheel? Terry does an exceptional job in presenting this material in an exciting way. When I talk to attendees at these

classes, all participants seem really impressed at what they have learned and Terry's knowledge on the subject. Terry recently retired from the city of Topeka but has decided to continue training as long as it does not get in the way of his fishing time.

Kansas law requires that all water purveyors protect their water supply to the last tap. All water systems must have a cross connection ordinance or bylaws in place and those rules need to be enforced. That means that not only is every public water system required to make sure that the water is safe to drink when it leaves the water facility,

systems are responsible and must take precautions to protect it on the customers' properties also. Kansas law also states that water systems need to isolate any possible contaminates from getting into customers' water on their own property. That means systems must enforce a backflow program that stops the potential problem at the source. Containing the problem at the meter is not enough.

I was responsible for implementation of the backflow program at my small city for 22 years. It was a lot of extra work, but I believe it was worth the effort. Sending out letters to the hospital, dentists, veterinary clinics, mortuaries, fertilizer plants, anyone with a boiler, and owners of a properties with lawn sprinkler systems was an annual task. Even after the letters were sent out there was still quite a bit of work involved in making sure the paperwork was returned to the city. Next would be sending out second notice letters stating that if they were not received, the city would discontinue service. Shutting off someone's water never happened in that city because of non-compliance with the city's backflow ordinance. Usually, it was just a mis-communication problem that was



This is an example of hands-on testing at a KRWA backflow prevention training.



Attendees learn about backflow/cross connection issues and how to prevent them from happening.

cleared up. Finally, it required reading through the paperwork to check that the responses were completed accurately and that the technician shown as doing the testing was currently certified.

Education is Imperative

Here's the real question. If you are not aware of what a cross connection is, how can you prevent one from happening? Have you ever looked around your house and tried to identify any possible problems? The biggest one that I am guilty of is using a hose-end sprayer. You know, that's the sprayer you put on the end of your hose and fill up the bottle with weed killer or other chemicals and turn on the water and spray your yard. Would you knowingly drink that chemical? I am not saying you should not use hose-end sprayers, but people need to be made aware of the risks. Another really common potential for a cross connection is the

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flush valve in toilet tanks. I know I would not want to drink the water in the tank of my toilet. A new anti-syphon flush valve is relatively inexpensive and easy to install.

One of the things I try to impress on attendees at the KRWA training sessions is the more that operators and other system personnel can do to build their work resume the more important they will be to their employer. It is definitely a plus to be able to state that an operator has successfully completed training on cross connection/backflow prevention and as many other areas as possible. If your employer does not want to send you explain to them that it can be beneficial for both of you. I recently visited with an employee of a rural water district that had a dozen or so backflow prevention assemblies owned by the district. They were

paying a company to test these assemblies \$125 per assembly every year. He is now certified and saving the district \$1,500 a year. Not a bad investment.

Even if you may not interested in becoming certified, the first two days of the class are informational and are without cost. A lot of good information is shared and is sure to help anyone become more knowledgeable. Office personnel and other employees could easily gain a better understanding of why water systems need to have and implement a cross connection program. This would get everyone on the same page of why the program is so important.

Education of the public is another important part of the program. Most people will understand and appreciate the great lengths that water systems go through to protect the drinking water. Present information to any clubs and community leaders about how important that their drinking water is to them. Providing information to school students is another great way to get the word out. Children are often fascinated with things such as this. Maybe they will go home and have a conversation

with their parents about the importance of good quality and safe water.

I want to thank everyone who has attended any of the KRWA training sessions held across the state. The training calendar for next year is filling up fast. KRWA is very interested in providing high quality training in any area of interest. Check out the KRWA website for the sessions. And if you ever have any suggestions for more and different training give us a call or send an email. My address is bret@krwa.net. KRWA is "Your Organization" and it's been here to help and it will continue to be. I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Conference & Exhibition and future training sessions.

Bret Beye joined the KRWA staff in March 2017. He previously worked for 30 years at the city of Herington where he was Water Distribution and Sewer Collection Foreman. A Class III water operator and certified as a backflow device technician, Bret also served on the USD 487 Board of Education from 2003 to April 2017 where he was board president and vice-president.



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