

What is a cross-connection?

Any physical connection created between a possible source of contamination and any drinking water system piping.

What is backflow?

It is the flow through a cross-connection from a possible source of contamination back into the drinking water system. It occurs when a cross-connection is created and a pressure reversal, either as backsiphonage or backpressure, occurs in the water supply piping.

Why be concerned?

- ALL cross-connections pose a potential health risk.
- Backflow can be a health hazard for your family or other consumers if contaminated water enters your water supply plumbing system and is used for drinking, cooking or bathing. Chemical burns, fires, explosions, poisonings, illness and death have all been caused by backflow through cross-connections.
- Backflow occurs more often than you think.
- You are legally responsible for protecting your water supply plumbing from backflow that may contaminate drinking water, either your own or someone else's. This includes complying with the plumbing code and not creating cross-connections.

What causes backsiphonage?

Backsiphonage occurs when there is a loss of pressure in a piping system. This can occur if the water supply pressure is lost or falls to a level lower than the source of contamination. This condition, which is similar to drinking from a glass with a straw, allows liquids to be siphoned back into the distribution system.

What causes backpressure?

Backpressure occurs when a higher opposing pressure is applied against the public water system's pressure. This condition allows undesirable gases or liquids from another system to enter the drinking water supply. Any pumping system (such as a well pump) or pressurized system (such as steam or hot water boilers) can exert backpressure when cross-connected with the public water system.

What can I do?

- Be aware of and eliminate cross-connections.
- Maintain air gaps. Do not submerge hoses or place them where they could become submerged.
- Use hose bib vacuum breakers on fixtures (hose connections in the basement, laundry room and outside).
- Install approved, testable backflow preventers on lawn irrigation systems.
- Do not create a connection between an auxiliary water system (well, cistern, body of water) and the water supply plumbing.

What must be done to protect the public water system?

The public water supplier must determine potential and actual hazards. If a hazard exists at a customer's public water supply service connection, the customer will be required to install and maintain an appropriate backflow preventer* at the meter and/or at the source of the hazard.

*Check with your water supplier to verify which backflow preventer is required before purchase or installation.

Who is responsible?

In Ohio, the responsibility for preventing backflow is divided. In general, state and local plumbing inspectors have authority over plumbing systems within buildings while Ohio EPA and water suppliers regulate protection of the distribution system at each service connection.

Water customers have the ultimate responsibility for properly maintaining their plumbing systems. It is the homeowner's or other customer's responsibility to ensure that cross-connections are not created and that any required backflow preventers are tested yearly and are in operable condition.

What is the law?

Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 3745-95 requires the public water supplier to protect the public water system from cross-connections and prevent backflow situations. The public water supplier must conduct cross-connection control inspections of their water customers' property to evaluate hazards. Local ordinances or water department regulations may also exist and must be followed in addition to state regulations.

What are some common backflow hazards that threaten the homeowner and other consumers?

- Hose connections to chemical solution aspirators to feed lawn and shrub herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers.
- Lawn irrigation systems.
- Chemically treated heating systems.
- Hose connections to a water outlet or laundry tub.
- Swimming pools, hot tubs, spas.
- Private and/or non-potable water supplies located on the property.
- Water-operated sump drain devices.
- Feed lots/livestock holding areas or barnyards fed through pipes or hoses from your water supply plumbing.

What are examples of cross-connection and backflow scenarios?

- Soapy water or other cleaning compounds backsiphon into the water supply plumbing through a faucet or hose submerged in a bucket or laundry basin.
- Pool water backsiphons into the water supply plumbing through a hose submerged in a swimming pool.
- Fertilizers/pesticides backsiphon into the water supply plumbing through a garden hose attached to a fertilizer/pesticide sprayer.
- Chemicals/pesticides and animal feces drawn into the water supply plumbing from a lawn irrigation system with submerged nozzles.
- Bacteria/chemicals/additives in a boiler system backsiphon into the water supply plumbing.
- Unsafe water pumped from a private well applies backpressure and contaminates the public water supply through a connection between the private well discharge and the potable water supply plumbing.