



Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works

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24-hour Emergency Service for
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Management

(410) 222-2222
Constituent Services

(410) 222-8050
Police Department

(410) 222-8200
Fire Department

(410) 222-1144
Utilities Billing Information

Backflow Protection and Your Drinking Water

The Bureau of Utility Operations makes every effort to ensure that water delivered to your home and business is clean, safe and free of contamination. We work to protect the quality of the water from the time the water is extracted via deep wells from underground aquifers until it reaches the tap.

But what happens when the water reaches your home or business? Is there still a need to protect the water quality and if so, how? Backflow is a problem that many water consumers are unaware of — a problem that each and every water customer has a responsibility to prevent.

What is backflow and what causes it?

When the pressure in a specific plumbing system is higher than the water pressure in the distribution system, or when the pressure in the distribution system drops, water may flow backward into the water distribution system. This is called backflow.

Backflow has two main causes. One is a sudden reduction in water pressure in the distribution system, such as may occur during water main breaks and firefighting. Water tends to move from areas of high pressure to areas of low pressure. When the water distribution system is in a state of lower pressure, toxic chemicals or other contaminants may flow backward into the public water system. Backflow can also be created by private recirculating systems, pumps, thermal expansion and elevation, which can supply higher water pressures than the incoming water supply and therefore cause a reversal in the direction of the water.

What can I do to help prevent backflow?

Some seemingly harmless, everyday actions may actually be potentially dangerous. Leaving a garden hose in a bucket of soapy water while washing the car, spraying your garden with insecticide in a garden hose sprayer, or attaching a handsprayer to the faucet to wash your pet are all potentially harmful cross connections, that should the pressure drop in the water distribution system, cause potentially dangerous contaminants to enter the public water system.

By being aware of what a cross connection is and how it can affect the public water system, you can play an important role in helping to protect our public water system.



Anne Arundel County Executive
John R. Leopold



Handy tips to prevent backflow...

- Do not allow hoses attached to the water system to lay in buckets of water, ponds, fountains, pet watering containers, chemicals, drains or garden sprayers.
- Do not allow hand spray attachments for washing pets or shampooing hair to lie in standing water in sinks or buckets.
- Be aware when using automatic toilet bowl cleaners that some inferior float valves allow water to siphon back into the potable water system.
- Keep hoses out of buckets of soapy water when washing cars, lawn furniture and decks.
- Avoid hoses lying in swimming and wading pools and hot tubs. Hoses should be above the flood rim and out of standing water.
- Buy appliances and equipment with a backflow preventer — an approved testable assembly which uses valves in varying configurations to prevent contaminated water from reversing direction and flowing into the potable water supply.
- Have backflow preventers tested yearly by plumbers or certified backflow inspectors.



Spring is coming ... remember to conserve!

- Water early in the morning and late in the evening to avoid evaporation.
- Use mulch. Two to three inches of mulch in a garden bed acts like insulation. It helps retain moisture and cool temperatures in the summer and helps protect plant roots from frost in the winter.
- Put in rain barrels in winter or early spring and capture some of the rain for watering this summer.
- When watering, use a hose with a shut off nozzle. Better yet, buy a cheaper, more efficient soaker hose or opt for easy installation drip irrigation.
- Use a broom and not a water hose to clean walkways, driveways and sidewalks. This saves water and protects local water bodies from polluted water run-off.
- Use commercial car washes that recycle and treat the water they use.
- Check sprinkler settings and timers regularly.