BACKFLOW TESTERS — GUIDE

What a backflow test checks

Understand the assembly test, the report and the utility notice before you book.

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A backflow test checks how a backflow prevention assembly operates. It is not a laboratory test of drinking water. The EPA manual explains how a connection between drinking water and another system can let unwanted water flow back into the supply. A pressure change can reverse normal flow. [EPA, February 2003, chapters on backflow and testing.]

Why an assembly needs testing

An assembly contains parts that must work when pressure changes. The EPA manual describes field tests for check valves, relief valves and vacuum breakers. A device can look sound while an internal part does not close correctly. A visual check alone does not give the field test result.

The legal duty comes from the applicable state rule and local program. Washington's WAC 246-290-490(7) requires testing of covered assemblies on installation and after repair, reinstallation, relocation or a backflow incident. It also requires annual testing thereafter, with more frequent testing possible in the circumstances named in the rule. This is a Washington rule, not a federal schedule for every property.

Before the visit

Send the tester the utility notice and the assembly nameplate. Include its location, model, serial number and use. Tell the tester if it serves irrigation, a building supply or a fire line. Ask what access is needed and whether the work will interrupt water service. Arrange access through a facility contact.

Ask your water utility to confirm that the named individual can submit a report for your property. Company registration and individual certification are different checks. Do not assume a general plumbing listing settles either point.

After the visit

Request the completed report and the submission receipt. Match the address and serial number against your records. Ask whether the utility accepted the result. If the assembly fails, request the failure details and a written repair proposal. Keep the initial and final reports together. A booking confirmation or invoice is not proof that a report was accepted.

Sources

All sources below were fetched on 2026-11-10. Dates beside titles identify publication, revision or access dates. This guide is information for planning. Confirm the current requirements with your water utility.

- US EPA, Cross-Connection Control Manual, February 2003.
- Washington Legislature, WAC 246-290-490, effective 2022-01-01.

Frequently asked questions

Does a passing test prove water quality?

No. It records assembly performance during a field test. It is not a drinking water sample result.

Who sets my deadline?

Ask the water utility named on your notice. Do not replace its deadline with a general annual reminder.