
Backflow Industry

by Paul Bladdick, FASSE,
LPB Company, Inc.

Without a doubt, codes are necessary to protect the public, and we need standards to protect the industry. But how far is too far? Does the imposition of onerous laws and regulations truly serve the purpose of protecting the public and our industry?

Recently the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have challenged the Uniform Plumbing and Mechanical Codes. They claim the codes are too restrictive, particularly regarding the Code's requirement for a backflow preventer at each dialysis unit.

Currently, the UPC (Uniform Plumbing Code) requires the installation of a RPBP (Reduced Pressure Backflow Preventer) at each unit. These units are generally fed water from a reverse osmosis (RO) unit, which also requires a backflow preventer to be installed immediately upstream from it. Overkill? Maybe. However, that is not the AAMI's chief concern. The AAMI claims that material used to make the backflow preventer may contaminate the dialysis process. This seems to be a logical argument. If, on the other hand, the backflow preventer is removed, how is one dialysis unit protected from another connected to the same RO supply unit? Is bottled purified water the only solution?

Flawed Process—Complain or Correct?

The answer will evolve by developing a consensus on the code and the standard development process. The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) has asked the AAMI and the FDA to contribute to the code development process. In addition, Ron Chapman, Past President of the American Backflow Prevention Association (ABPA) and chairman of their external affairs committee, has requested that ABPA members submit comments to their national office.

The ASSE (American Society of Sanitary Engineering) is deeply involved with the development of standards and codes. Perhaps we should also become involved with this process? Shannon is most likely saying to herself, "Thanks Paul, just what we need, another job and perhaps another committee." But the solution to onerous codes is simple: *We must be involved with the process of code development!* To that end, I urge all of you to contact our International Office and contribute your comments via email at General.info@asse-plumbing.org. AAMI President Michael Miller has expressed the opinion that the consensus process may not provide a resolution fast enough. Speed is of the essence.

ASSE Must Get Involved

ASSE has long been a leader in cross connection control, living by its motto "Prevention Rather Than Cure". Through the efforts of our dedicated members and very competent staff, backflow preventers and backflow prevention have evolved and improved. Just look at the list of our standards and the fact that they are ANSI approved to see this tremendous advancement and accomplishment. ASSE membership consists of some of the brightest and most prolific minds in the plumbing industry. Whenever a problem or deficiency is suspected, a team of ASSE members goes into action for the betterment of us all. Potential contamination of dialysis equipment should be no different. We must take a leadership role in resolving this latest issue.

It matters little which of the trade associations you choose to join. The plumbing industry and the protection of public health is everybody's turf. We must all work together because only by joining forces and working together can we achieve the results necessary to move forward. Protectionism creates tunnel vision, tunnel vision creates blind spots, blind spots create obstacles and obstacles slow the process. This is not what we need, nor will it improve the problem.

Conclusion

I know I am preaching to the choir, but the question remains: Are backflow codes too restrictive? Have they gone too far or not far enough? The industry—and the powers that regulate it—need to hear your thoughts. Don't sit back and complain. Help improve the process, lighten the burden and protect the public. Together we can make it happen.

Don't forget the ICC (International Code Council) hearings are in Cincinnati, Ohio this year. The plumbing section starts on Saturday February 26th at 8:00 AM.



Backflow industry concerns are a to be a regular feature in this magazine. If you have a question, comment or concern about a particular backflow issue, e-mail Paul Bladdick at backflowservices@comcast.net. ●