



The Importance of Administration and Enforcement

In our line of work, we field questions from contractors and technicians concerning repairs, installations, and general backflow prevention practices. We'd like to share some questions that we receive as well as our answers. Everyone has different opinions on these subjects and we would like to hear yours. Contact us with questions and ideas via email at: imark@backflowparts.com or mail us at American Backflow Products Co., PO Box 37025, Tallahassee, Florida 32315.

– Mark Inman and Jason Gregg

Question:

I am the utility inspector for a city in Michigan. My primary job responsibility involves the administration and enforcement of the city's cross connection program. During my inspections, from time to time, I am encountering wooden wedges located in the relief port of one brand of RPZ. It appears that the wedges are being installed when customers complain about the RPZ leaking. Is this a common problem in other parts of the country? Is there anything that the manufacturers can do to help with this issue? Any suggestions for how to deal with this problem?

Mark:

Unfortunately, what you have described does happen in other areas of the country. In fact, "tampering" with the RV assembly can happen to any manufacturer and in different ways. You will also see other things like: RV springs in the wrong place or missing, flat washers placed on top of RV stems, steel plates placed over vent openings, relief valves completely removed and plugged....etc. This is all done in a creative attempt to stop the "leak". What makes this problem very difficult to prevent, is the fact that this type of tampering is not usually done maliciously or by certified technicians.



Photos courtesy of sacwsd.org

Jason:

What you will find, more times than not, is that tampering is done by someone that has no knowledge of backflow prevention or backflow assemblies. It could be a maintenance man or construction worker that will try to "fix" a leaky situation. They may have the best of intentions, but, simply do not understand how to repair a backflow preventer. Many times the only way that these homemade remedies are found is when a certified technician is called out for the annual inspection. One suggestion would be to call the building owner or maintenance company directly and explain the problem. You may need to take a little time and educate them to call a certified technician when they notice a problem with their assembly.



Mark:

So, now the question comes to the manufacturer and what they can design to keep this from happening. I basically look at it like a pad lock on a gate. Pad locks and gates are only for law abiding citizens. If someone really wants to get in they will, no matter what you do to prevent it. The manufacturers are required by USC and other agencies to build their assemblies as tamper proof as possible. I think they do a pretty good job, but they are not perfect. If they were, then we would probably have 10,000 pound iron fortress assemblies that would be so expensive no one could afford them.

Jason:

As a utility inspector, your best defense is your staff and the technicians that work within your system. You will not be able to keep tampering like this from happening altogether, but the key is to be able to catch it and correct it as quickly as possible. A suggestion would be to communicate and work with the technicians closely and make sure they are out being your eyes and ears to identify existing problems. You might hold meetings with them, from time to time, to discuss some of the problems that concern you and get feed back from them as well. ▼

Photos courtesy of sacwsd.org

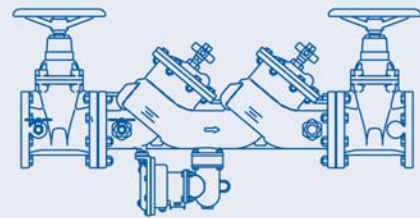


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