

Water testing

Proposal helps district, not homeowners

To the editor:

This is in response to an article (March 20) about the Georgetown County Water and Sewer District's proposed policy changes with regard to backflow prevention.

One possible change is the rescission of the "grandfather policy" which currently does not require water meters, used strictly for irrigation, to have an inspectable backflow prevention device. There are about 500 water meters throughout the district which were installed prior to June 2000 that pose a high degree of vulnerability to potential contamination of the public water supply.

The other proposed policy change involves the district taking over the annual inspections of all the existing backflow valves, approximately 1,000 to date, which would be in direct competition with me and other DHEC general testers.

I became a licensed tester in 2002 after realizing there was an opportunity to provide a more economical service in contrast to the exorbitant pricing that many were charging for the testing of backflow valves.

Over the past five years, it also became apparent that Georgetown County Water and Sewer was not enforcing the already written policies contained in their own cross-connection control manual which was amended in July 2000.

Throughout this manual there are numerous references to a water service

being terminated, discontinued or disconnected for various backflow protection or inspection violations.

To the best of my knowledge, any form of consequential enforcement, including a reconnection fee, has never been used consistently to achieve 100 percent compliance.

According to Brad Corkum, the district's operation director, there are three reminder notices sent out annually to irrigation customers to have their backflow valves inspected.

He has also made the following claim with regard to percentages of compliance. The first notice achieves a 30 percent compliance within a 30-45 day period. The second notification, a postcard, brings about 65 percent and the final reminder postcard brings the total compliance to 90 percent with 10 percent remaining uninspected.

Last year was an entirely different story. The initial notification letter was dated July 10, the second reminder postcard was delivered in late October and final postcard was not mailed until the third week of January 2008, when there were still approximately 200 meters (20 percent) uninspected with a cut-off date set for Feb. 18.

I am not privy to the final amount of valves that remain uninspected for 2007.

Based on my past experience and information from my customers, there appears to be many backflow inspections which were

somehow waived at the end of each year.

In my opinion, to achieve a better percentage of compliance, the following target schedule of notification should be adopted: Initial letter, delivered by April 15, second notice, delivered by Aug. 1, and the final notice delivered by Oct. 1.

There should also be a list of certified licensed testers included, something that is not presently done, to reduce the administrative costs associated with re-mailing, faxing or verbally relaying this tester information by phone.

In December 2007, the district chairman, Bill Schwartzkopf, told the management team in charge, "You're going to have to do a lot of research" in implementing any policy change.

The only research that involved my input was to have an administrative associate contact me to find out about my inspection agreement pricing and specific material and labor costs of installing a new backflow device.

Now the district is using this information in an attempt to put me and other testers out of business.

The basic selling points of these proposed policy changes are to protect the public water supply, public health and absolving you of the burden or responsibility in obtaining the services of a certified tester.

Of course any success with this policy change is also based on the monetary gains through the collection of annual inspection and in-

stallation fees which will enable the district to hire an individual to perform these duties.

The fact remains there cannot be a mandate that all backflow devices be inspected by a district employee, especially since many of my own customers have signed agreements extending into 2011 and would prefer dealing with someone like me from the private sector.

If you consider the ineffectiveness of district in implementing the currently written enforcement policies over the past seven years, it appears to me that they have mistakenly proposed these "new and improved" policy changes to absolve their own burden, not yours.

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