

Water and sewer

Utility dictating who can inspect valves

To the editor:

The Georgetown Water and Sewer District's "valued irrigation customers" have just received another letter informing them that they will be charged a fee of \$4 per month beginning July 1.

This fee is being assessed to cover the administration and inspection/testing of the current backflow devices installed within the district.

If you have not been following this issue closely, you can find copies of newspaper articles and other information under the Local News tab at the Web site www.coastalinspections.com.

This recent letter, dated May 14, apparently was mailed either that morning or early afternoon. The board of directors did not actually vote to accept this fee increase proposal until after 6 p.m. that same evening.

Most of the letter's content consists of the district's commitment to provide potable drinking water, why you need an operational backflow valve, and how much of a benefit their service will be to you.

Again, they mention how they want to relieve you of the burden of finding a private testing company to perform this service and to also include any repair and replacement of your valve.

I can assure you that the failure

rate of these valves is minimal and can be easily repaired with an inexpensive seal or by flushing the valve out. In the past five years, I have only replaced one backflow valve which was buried for years. This poor installation allowed the shut-off handles to rust off completely which rendered it un-testable although still operational.

The letter states that Georgetown County Water and Sewer plans to honor any existing multi-year contracts that customers already have with their own certified testers until their expiration date. The contracted customers will have until July 1 to provide the district with a copy of their existing contract.

Here's the kicker: The very next sentence, underlined for emphasis, states: "The district will not honor agreements entered into after May 19, 2008."

How can they mail you a fee-increase notice on a Thursday and give you only three business days to sign up with your own contractor?

Moreover, they have not even considered the plight of out-of-state owners, who may not receive the notice for several more days after the deadline.

What many homeowners may not realize is that they own their backflow valve, not the water company,

and the only requirement is to have it inspected on an annual basis.

The responsibility of the district is to collect the testing records and submit them to the Department of Health and Environmental Control each year.

Although you may not feel the new \$4 monthly fee is unreasonable, what will your options be if they decide to raise the price in the future? Will you be able to hire a private tester, at a later date, who will do it for less?

By not honoring any agreements after May 19 they are dictating who can and will inspect your backflow valve. The legality of this self-serving mandate is extremely questionable and may ultimately be settled in a court of law.

Maybe Georgetown County Water and Sewer should really be focusing on the annual inspection, repair and flow testing of the 2,000-plus fire hydrants within the district so that you can be reassured that your home, wherever it may be within the district, will not be the next one to burn to the ground.

Do you know the last time your fire hydrant was inspected?

Tom McGaughan
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The writer owns Coastal Inspections.