

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING YOUR RESIDENTIAL FIRE SPRINKLER SERVICE (RFSS) AND YOUR WATER SERVICE

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) takes seriously its pledge to provide top quality drinking water to its customers. This mission requires a partnership between PWD and its customers to ensure that drinking water quality is never compromised. The RFSS requirements are one example of this ongoing partnership.

What is an RFSS, and why do I have one?

Construction code* now requires new townhomes to have a fire sprinkler system. Traditionally, water for fire and domestic services (the water supply to the rest of your home) was supplied from two separate pipes, each connected to the city's water main. To save costs for homeowners, PWD now allows **Residential Fire Sprinkler Service (RFSS)** connections. This means that one pipe, connected to the City main, delivers water to your fire sprinkler system and to the rest of your home.

How does this affect my water quality?

The water delivered to your home is top quality. When you use water for bathing, cooking, laundry, etc. this keeps the water in your home plumbing fresh. But when water in a pipe is not frequently used, it stagnates and water quality degrades. This can occur in fire sprinkler systems where the water is rarely used. Under certain conditions, the stagnant water can reverse direction or **"backflow,"** and mix with the water in your home and in the City water supply. This can result in unpleasant tastes and odors or even illness. To prevent this from happening, your home may have been equipped with a **backflow prevention device**.

Why do I need to maintain my backflow prevention device?

In order to work properly and protect your home's and the city's water quality, the backflow prevention device must be well maintained. PWD regulation 403 requires backflow prevention devices to be tested annually by a certified backflow protection technician at the cost of the owner. Testing costs can vary but are typically about \$200 per year. If a homeowner repeatedly fails to have the maintenance and annual test performed, **PWD can shut off the water service**. This action is taken only as a last resort to ensure the protection of all of our customers.

Is there an alternative to maintaining the backflow prevention device?

Yes. Instead of performing repeated maintenance and costly annual testing of the backflow prevention device, you can hire a registered fire suppression contractor to make a plumbing modification. In this modification, it may be necessary to install an additional water line connecting a remote fire sprinkler head to a toilet tank. This ensures that the water in the fire service branch is flushed periodically and less prone to stagnation. Then, the backflow prevention device will be permanently removed. **PWD recommends taking this option, as it will ultimately result in a cost savings to you.**

Where can I get more information?

For more information about backflow prevention & cross connection control, visit www.phila.gov/water/CCC.html, or call the PWD Cross Connection Control unit at 215-685-1419.

*Code of General Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia, Title 4. For more information, see L&I Code Bulletin No. 1001-R1.