



MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

Rely on us.

TO: Commissioners Brown, Carlson, Mital, Simpson and Helgeson
FROM: Mel Damewood, Chief Water Engineering and Operations Officer
Jason Carman, Water Distribution Operations Supervisor
DATE: March 19, 2018
SUBJECT: Phasing Out EWEB's Residential ATA Backflow Testing Services Program
OBJECTIVE: Information Only

Issue

This memo is to inform the Board of the upcoming phasing out of the EWEB-facilitated Residential ATA Backflow Testing Services Program and the re-focusing on an existing program that will lower costs and increase the freedom of choice for customers.

Background

Backflow prevention assemblies are a common and very important feature in drinking water systems. These assemblies prevent water or potential contaminants from flowing backwards through the customer's private line into the public drinking water system. Due to the threat of contamination, backflow prevention assemblies are critical to the safety of EWEB's water system.

Most commercial water services have backflow prevention assemblies installed after the meter. On the residential side, customers with irrigation systems, booster pumps, or other features that could result in a back-feed to the EWEB system are required to have a backflow prevention assembly.

The Oregon Administrative Rules require that the backflow prevention assemblies be tested annually. Water Operations ensures that required annual tests are completed on approximately 7,100 commercial and 9,400 residential backflow prevention assemblies each year. All of these assemblies are owned by the customer and typically installed on the customer side of the water service.

For over 10 years, EWEB has offered to facilitate this testing for both residential and commercial customers. This work by EWEB, referred to as "EWEB's Residential ATA Backflow Testing Services Program" consists of the following efforts:

- Maintaining a database of the installed backflow prevention assemblies.
- Assigning the tests to Oregon Health Authority (OHA) certified backflow assembly testers (Testers).
- Sending reminder post cards and emails to the Testers.
- Following up with the Testers for incomplete tests or required repairs.
- Processing the Tester's invoices and billing the customer for the test, which is included in their normal monthly EWEB bill.

The program was originally created to make the annual required testing activities easier for the customer. Without the program, customers with backflow prevention assemblies receive all of the reminder communications from EWEB and have to select a Tester on their own. Failure to complete the required tests could result in a discontinuation of water service. Reports from the backflow database are used to ensure that the testing is completed annually for all assemblies.

Discussion

From 2010 to 2017, the percentage of residential customers with backflow prevention assemblies participating in the facilitated EWEB program steadily declined from 37% to 26%. With the percentage of participants in the facilitated program dwindling in recent years, and an opportunity to streamline the process for customers, EWEB will discontinue the program. In its place, EWEB will re-focus on its Good As Gold program, where each customer will be able to designate a yearly tester and will be automatically placed in that Tester's work queue each year.

By enrolling in the Good As Gold Program, customers will:

- Continue to avoid multiple letters and other reminders from EWEB.
- Save money by contracting directly with the Tester.
- Have the freedom to choose which Tester completes their tests.
- Pay the Tester directly, not EWEB.

The main benefits to customers are lower cost and the ability to choose which Tester they work with, and they may change that at any time. Benefits to EWEB include reduced administration efforts and the ability to reallocate labor resources to providing improved customer service.

The Commercial ATA Backflow Testing Services program will remain in place due to commercial services having a much higher backflow risk associated per service due to the nature of the connected facilities.

Recommendation

This memo is for informational purposes only.

Requested Board Action

No board action is requested at this time. Please contact me at 541-685-7145 or mel.damewood@eweb.org with any questions.