

Backflow Valve Update - 6/21/08

At sometime in the future, about a 1,000 homes in SCC who irrigate from a well or pond will be forced by the County to install backflow valves.

Don't pay to have the valve installed now! Wait until the County's assistance program, explained below, kicks in this fall. And even then, you might want to wait until you're cited.

The Hillsborough County Water Resource Services (WRS) is working on a new backflow valve ordinance to become effective this fall. Some of the tentative new provisions are that homeowners will still be required to pay for the cost and installation of the valve. However, the County is going to set a cost cap of about \$350 or less (subject to change every 3 years) on the purchase and installation of a backflow valve when it is done by the county.

The county may also designate certain plumbers as part of their program. But be very careful not to use just any plumber, because the county will not assume the responsibility after October for testing and maintaining the valve if they (or their designated plumber) did not install it.

Wait until the County fully explains the program to you.

Currently installed valves are grandfathered in. The scam will be that plumbers will offer to install the valve for much less than \$350, but then, knowing that you won't be able to turn the responsibility for the yearly testing over to the county, will do the yearly testing for you for some outrageous amount!

The \$350 charge will be added to your water bill over a 12-month period with no interest. Once the valve is installed by them, the County will assume full responsibility for the yearly inspection, maintenance and replacement of the valve. This would amount to a savings of about \$50/year to a homeowner, compared to the current system where the homeowner pays for the yearly testing.

Sometime in September or October, WRS will send out a "Customer Survey" asking if you irrigate from a well or pond. If you respond to the survey that you have a well or pump lake water, the valve will be installed and you will be charged the \$350. If you cannot afford to install the valve (or don't like the concept of self-incrimination) and don't respond to the Survey, you will not be penalized. What will typically happen is that when you are cited or the next time

your water meter is replaced, which occurs about every ten years, you will be given the **one-time** option of paying the county (or their designated plumber) to buy and install the valve for \$350 and then having the county assume the testing, maintenance and replacement thereafter. Or else, you'll be forced to stop irrigating from your well or pond.

My hope is that if the valves really mean all that much to WRS and since the valves protect all WRS customers, that WRS will pickup the cost and spread it over all of their customer base. An increase of just two pennies in the general water rates would more than pay for the valves and a full-time crew to install them around the County, particularly if the installation coincided with the replacement of water meters.

There will be a public hearing before the County Commissioners on the new ordinance sometime in the next couple of months. Hopefully, a couple of busloads of Sun City Center residents can go to urge the Commissioners that WRS should also pickup the cost of buying and installing the valves - seeing as how the valves protect all of their customers.

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