



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:

Agenda Item Number: 14

Agenda Date: November 7, 2024

In Control: City Council A Session

DEPARTMENT: Finance Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Troy Elliott

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Amendments to Chapter 34, Article VI, Division 8 Backflow Prevention

SUMMARY:

This ordinance approves proposed amendments to Chapter 34 of the City Code related to improvements to SAWS Backflow Program

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To protect the public water supply from backflow contamination, rules set by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) require public water systems to conduct customer service inspections and ensure that the appropriate backflow prevention device is installed and working properly. Consistent with state and local law, a backflow prevention program is authorized and described in Chapter 34, Article VI, Division 8 of the City Code. This backflow prevention program requires the installation, annual inspection and testing of backflow prevention devices to prevent the contamination of the potable water system. TCEQ requires all public water systems to maintain a cross-connection control program that protects the distribution system delivering drinking water to your home or business. Failure to have a backflow prevention assembly tested can lead to contamination of the public water supply and the water on the customer's property.

SAWS is proposing an update to the City Code to improve the backflow inspection process. These changes will primarily impact commercial class customers who pose a potential health hazard through a cross-connection and some residential class customers deemed high risk by the TCEQ, such as customers with septic systems or water wells. The major change will be adjusting the due date for inspections from June 30th to a rolling 12 months. This will allow SAWS to better accommodate customers, spread the use of inspection resources throughout the year, and; accommodate moving to a third-party vendor to administer the Test & Maintenance Reports.

While all irrigation systems connected to SAWS system must include the installation of a backflow prevention device (assembly); only assemblies classified as high-hazard must undergo annual testing by a certified tester. These high-hazard assemblies pose a significant risk of cross-connection, representing a serious health and safety risks to the water supply.

Currently, SAWS monitors approximately 47,000 high-hazard assemblies. The vast majority of these assemblies are commercial accounts. The TCEQ deems all commercial accounts to be high-hazard. In addition, there are approximately 5,000 residential class backflow assemblies that are identified as high-hazard. This represents approximately 1% of the 510,187 residential class customers served by SAWS. This high-hazard classification for residential customers is based on risk factors like septic systems or water wells on their property.

The proposed ordinance will authorize the following adjustments to Chapter 34, Article VI, Division 8 of the City Code:

- Adjustment to the due date of Test and Maintenance Reports from June 30th to a rolling twelve months, to better accommodate customers, spread the use of inspection resources throughout the year, and to accommodate moving to a third-party administrator.
- Clarification of the definitions related to backflow assembly.
- Clarification of the wording and authority of SAWS to inspect backflow prevention assemblies.
- And other minor language adjustments.

Certified testers are currently required to electronically submit inspection reports to SAWS through an electronic portal. SAWS is in the process of transitioning to a third-party vendor who will handle the management of these reports, provide software services, and offer customer support. The certified tester will be required to remit a \$9.95 fee to the vendor for each inspection report submitted through the portal. This industry standard practice is widely adopted by municipalities across Texas. Notably, the customers with high-hazard assemblies are not responsible for the payment of this fee; rather the certified tester must remit it.

ISSUE:

This ordinance will make amendments to Chapter 34, Article VI, Division 8 of the City Code to assist SAWS in making improvements to the backflow inspection process designed to prevent the contamination of the public water supply.

ALTERNATIVES:

If the ordinance is not passed and the amendments to Chapter 34, Article VI, Division are not made, SAWS will not be able to make needed improvements to the backflow program and will not be able to utilize a third-party to process reports and administer the program. Communication and Customer Support for SAWS customers with high-hazard backflow assemblies will not be able to be improved.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to SAWS or the City by the approval of the proposed ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the proposed ordinance.