

Wisconsin Rural Water Journal

Winter 2024

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Controlling Cross-Connections and Preventing Backflow THROUGH EDUCATION

Gary McLaren,
HydroCorp & Instructor with WRWA
Backflow Classes



40 hr. Backflow Assembly Tester Course

Wisconsin Rural Water Tech Center, Plover, WI



Congratulations to the 24 successful students who pass the October 2023 Backflow Testers Course!

While cross-connections and backflow hazards continue to reoccur in newer and older facilities due to non-compliant plumbing modifications, the diligent efforts of Wisconsin Public Water Systems continue to prove that education is a key part of that cross-connection control program success. I am convinced that the drinking water quality in facilities and public water systems across Wisconsin are safer than ever due to the many individuals who have attended a WRWA Backflow/Cross-Connection Class over the years.

With an average of 100-150 people per year attending WRWA Cross-Connection related classes, the data indicates water system professionals across the state are well versed in backflow awareness and in turn help communicate the topic in day-to-day operations. The Education impact is also reflected in local participation from water customers taking responsibility for eliminating hazards as a result of periodic cross-connection inspections performed by water system staff and contractors.

In 2024, HydroCorp and the Wisconsin Rural Water Association will be celebrating the 20th year of partnership for educational classes specifically focused on backflow prevention and cross-connection control requirements. The WRWA provided classes and resources on the topics prior to 2004, but it was during that year, the late Barry Walters of HydroCorp (Hydro Designs at the time) was invited to present a class specifically on cross-connection control programs as required by the DNR.

The class was a hit and I believe it was hosted with the Hudson Water Utility. Numerous subsequent classes were offered routinely throughout the following years. Barry could always get the class laughing while learning and his passion for cross-connection control was contagious. I caught the “bug” of teaching while learning from Barry and others in the waterworks industry and so there I was in 2008 at the Stevens Point Water Department along with Dave Cardinal of our Team, taking a crack at my first attempt instructing a class on cross-connection control and backflow. I admit, I was nervous as all get out, but I leaned on my Backflow Nerd knowledge of the plumbing code and field inspection experience to get through the jitters that day.

In 2011, WRWA invited our company to assemble the curriculum and instructor team that met the requirements of the 40-hour qualifier class for Backflow Preventer Testers in Wisconsin. I had big shoes to fill and was honored to carry the knowledge torch for Barry, our small company, and the WRWA. Co-Instructor Rich Davison of Soderholm has also been instrumental in the bi-annual course with his expert knowledge and teaching skills for backflow testing procedures.

Then in 2014 in response to WRWA member requests and the increase of DNR compliance enforcement of NR 810.15 Cross-Connection Control Program requirements, we formed the 3-day Cross-Connection Control Surveyor Class. The recent addition of the WRWA Tech Center really helped showcase a premier training facility for water and wastewater professionals.



Co-Instructor Rich Davison helps students understand the internal functions of backflow assemblies

With the continued popularity of these classes, additional 3 and 8-hour backflow basics classes and continuing education classes for certified backflow testers have become routine calendar dates on the WRWA website. When the pandemic quickly affected in-person education in the spring of 2020, WRWA and the HydroCorp Team quickly pivoted to offer live online class learning for several backflow tester refresher classes. We barely knew what Zoom was, let alone how to best deliver our routine class to a tiny camera on our laptop. We made it through, and our first online class had 92 people in attendance for 3 hours! Rich and I really learned the differences in online instruction and coordination compared to in-room teaching! Since then, the live online 3-hour classes are offered 4-6 times per year with an average attendance of 27 people. The addition of Tony Roche’s role at WRWA overseeing training events has really helped us improve the little but important details of the cross-connection classes this past year. The registration promotions, continuing education credit processing, and venue upkeep also have been modernized with Tony’s help.

This past fall WRWA hosted yet another backflow preventer tester course as we approach 20 years of partnership between HydroCorp and the association. I couldn’t be prouder of all the students who have both passed through the WRWA class doors and “logged in” to one of the online classes over the years. Our goal has been to teach waterworks professionals how to identify and help eliminate common cross-connections, not just recite codes and regulations.



Co-Instructor Rich Davison helps students understand the internal functions of backflow assemblies

If you are one of the many WRWA newsletter readers out there who has attended one of our classes, we thank you for attending and continuing to hear our beat of the drum for Backflow Basics, Cross-Connection Identifiers, and the practice of using the ASSE 4-digit reference number method to document backflow preventer types.

Backflow Pop Quiz: Which ASSE number is associated with the anti-siphon fill valve on the common residential toilet tank? Answer on page 57.

Visit the WRWA online calendar for the upcoming cross-connection and backflow tester classes in January and February 2024!



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Dean Bergstrom,
WRWA President, Cumberland

Message from the President

As I sit here writing this message to you, the weather is quite different than last year, as last year it seemed to snow just about every other day. This year we have had minimal flurries or dustings of snow up to this point. What a difference a year makes!

As I think about what WRWA has accomplished in 2023, some of the highlights include putting on one of the largest (if not the largest) conferences for the state of Wisconsin every spring and a very well-attended Outdoor Expo in August. We also purchased more property next to our main office in Plover, so we can expand our Outdoor Expo to make it even bigger and better. If you have been by the property, you will see that the land has been cleared and will have more spots for vendors at the Outdoor Expo, and more area for parking. The support that we receive from all the vendors always amazes me, either with the Sportsman's Raffle or the donations that have already been discussed for our new property, to help us make it a state-of-the-art outdoor facility to make our Outdoor Expo even better. It has been an awesome experience to be part of Wisconsin Rural Water Association and all the great things we do.

The 2024 Water Conference will be held March 26th-29th, 2024. It will be in La Crosse again this year. We are excited to announce that we will be having our water conference moved back to Green Bay for the years 2025 and 2026. We are going to try doing a two-year rotation—going to Green Bay for two years and coming back to La Crosse for two years. We are very excited to get back over to Green Bay, where we had been for many years. We will be at the Resch Center, next to Lambeau Field. It is going to be a much larger venue than in La Crosse, which will give us more opportunity to expand our conference. There will be many details coming in the future, so stay tuned. We look forward to seeing all of you this spring down in La Crosse.

I want to wish everyone a happy and healthy 2024. Until next time, stay warm and stay safe!

Dean



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WRWA Mission:
Assisting, educating
and representing
our members in the
Water & Wastewater
Industries.



Chris Groh,
WRWA Executive Director

Message from the Executive Director

2023 Year in Review

Every year that I have done a “Year in Review” I see one thing that is constant...change. I don’t like change. Unless it’s change for the better. I like pocket change too, but that seems to be a thing of the past. Most of my dealings with money is strictly by card. Something I still am not used to. I had a couple quarters in my pocket the other day and kept feeling them and thinking what the hell do I have in my pocket? Oh yeah, fifty cents!

This year’s changes were both good and bad. The year started with my friend and coworker Jeff LaBelle retiring. I miss him every day. We were about the same age and both had over 20 years in Rural Water. It was nice to have someone to commiserate with. I guess this is both a good and bad change, good for Jeff, bad for me. Which leads to the people I have hired for replacements and new programs. Dam they’re young! It’s keeping me on my toes, which is good for them and OK/bad for me. This influx of youth sure has changed WRWA, and mostly for the better. I think our staff is better reflecting what’s happening out in the state. There are a lot of retirees and fewer “old guys” around. The energy of having young people around is not wasted on me. There is enough of the “youngster” left in me to appreciate what these guys and gals will be doing for the next 20-40 years. Hopefully they will have a career as great as mine has been.

Politically, not a lot of movement in the state legislature. Although some bills are working their way through the process, I don’t see much hope in the product WRWA has advocated for. Even when money is available, someone will make it impossible to access. If you are trying to fund a project, you really need to work with your WRWA circuit rider or wastewater specialist to get the ball rolling and get some support. Sometimes we know another source, or another person to work with and find some help with your project. We always advocate for our membership and we are pretty well known in Madison, so we’ll keep at it until something happens.

The PFAS and LCR programs and updates have been winding up and winding down this year. Everyone seems to have gotten their testing done and luckily there aren’t a lot of major issues with our systems. Although some have been

unlucky enough to have tested higher for the PFAS compounds, most of the state’s small systems have very little or none. Thank goodness for that. As I suspected, there are mostly no hits or very low hits and we mostly have dodged a huge bullet. There were some places found to have higher concentrations of these compounds, and we will help deal with those results as you need. The lead and copper rule revision improvement (LCRRI) was recently released, and we will help our systems with that too. We’ll always be there for you.

Now that the year is winding down, we are already planning for next year. It’s never-ending, but that’s the way we like it. I foresee in the near future you’ll hear a knock on your door and you’ll see a WRWA staff member there asking what they can do for you. And like always, we’ll do our best to make your system a better one, and show you how to be an even better operator for your customers. So long 2023, and we look forward to seeing you in 2024.

Chris




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