

Nearly a Century After a Chicago Water Outbreak, Illinois Still Requires Annual Backflow Testing

As Elgin marks America's 250th anniversary, a local plumbing company points to the drinking-water safeguard the milestone rarely gets credit for

ELGIN, IL, UNITED STATES, August 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- ELGIN, Ill. — August 10, 2026 — As Elgin marks the 250th anniversary of American independence this year, one piece of public infrastructure behind the milestone goes largely unnoticed: the safeguard that keeps sewage, irrigation runoff and industrial fluids out of the drinking water supply.

Illinois requires that every testable backflow prevention device be inspected once a year by a state-certified inspector. The rule reaches commercial properties, buildings with fire-suppression systems, and any home with an irrigation line tied to city water. It applies whether or not the system is currently in use. Most property owners do not know it applies to them.

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The requirement traces to a failure about 40 miles from Elgin.

During Chicago's 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair, cross-connected plumbing at two downtown hotels let sewage into the drinking water supply. U.S. Public Health Service accounts record roughly 98 deaths and more than 1,000 illnesses across some 200 American cities, as fairgoers carried home an infection that took weeks to surface. It remains the only known widespread outbreak of

waterborne amoebic dysentery in a U.S. civilian population.

The response reshaped American plumbing. The Foundation for Cross-Connection Control and Hydraulic Research, now at the University of Southern California, was established in the

aftermath, and states began writing cross-connection control into law.

Under the Illinois Plumbing Code, backflow assemblies must be tested at installation and at least annually after that, and only a [licensed plumbing contractor certified by the Illinois EPA](#) as a Cross-Connection Control Device Inspector may perform the test. Municipalities must run their own cross-connection control programs and survey water customers every two years to find devices that are missing, untested or improperly installed.

Where the paperwork goes depends on the town. Some municipalities take test reports directly. Others contract third-party administrators to track compliance and notify owners when a test comes due. Fox Valley Plumbing & Backflow [files test reports with the City of Elgin](#), with BSI Online and with Aqua Backflow, the Elgin-based program administrator used by communities including Geneva and Carpentersville, and files directly with villages that require it.

"Every village handles it differently," said Matt Moraca, owner of Fox Valley Plumbing & Backflow. "Part of the job is knowing where each one wants the report to go, so the property owner isn't the one chasing it down."

Responsibility sits with the owner, not the water utility. A missed test can bring fines and, in some municipalities, disconnection of service.

"Celebrating 250 years of America is about honoring the people and communities that make our nation strong," Moraca said. "It's a privilege for Fox Valley Plumbing & Backflow to serve this community, and we're thankful for the trust our customers have placed in us."

Elgin, founded in 1835 along the Fox River, is marking the anniversary through a program organized by the Enhancing Elgin Committee of the Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce, with events running through 2026 in partnership with the Elgin History Museum, the Gail Borden Public Library, Elgin Community College and the City of Elgin.

Property owners unsure when their device was last tested can reach the company at (847) 624-3872 or foxvalleyplumbing.com.

About Fox Valley Plumbing & Backflow

Fox Valley Plumbing & Backflow is a licensed and insured plumbing contractor based in Elgin, Illinois, in business since 2010, specializing in [backflow testing and certification](#) alongside full residential and commercial plumbing services. The company serves Elgin, South Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia, Bartlett, Streamwood, Carol Stream, Hanover Park, Schaumburg, and Naperville, along with surrounding Fox Valley communities, holds Illinois plumbing licenses 058-161084 and 055-042593, carries an A+ rating from the Better Business Bureau, and maintains a 4.8-star average across its Google reviews.

Matthew Moraca

Fox Valley Plumbing And Backflow

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