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Sarasota County Announces Optional Backflow Prevention Program

Beginning in January 2008, Sarasota County Utilities customers who are required to install backflow preventer devices will be able to enroll in an optional testing program that may make it more convenient for them to comply with the statewide backflow prevention program that was enacted by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The program will give customers the option of contracting privately with a licensed plumber to complete the required annual testing, or enrolling in a county plan that uses licensed contractors under a competitive bid for their services. All service fees in the optional testing program will be applied in small, equal monthly charges to individual water bills. The cost for the program will vary depending upon the size of the backflow prevention assembly. The typical residential pipe size is three-quarter inch and cost \$2.53 per month.

Backflow prevention devices keep contaminated water from entering public drinking water through direct cross-connections in residential piping and other sources of water. For example, a resident may receive drinking water from the county utility, but use a well or a nearby creek, canal or pond for landscape irrigation. That practice could allow contaminated water to flow back into county utility lines. Indirect cross-contamination can occur when a garden hose is submerged into a swimming pool or a pail of water, or is connected to a pesticide dispenser.

Backflow preventers are required whether the additional water source is a well, pond or reuse system. Old wells with no pump attached are considered abandoned, but they must still have a backflow preventer installed, unless the well has been properly plugged.

The Backflow Prevention Program was enacted to protect the county's public utility system from possible contamination from sources of non-treated water. As of January 2007, Sarasota County Utilities customers who also use another source of water on their property must install a backflow prevention device and have it tested annually to ensure it is working properly.

All of Sarasota County's commercial water customers must install a backflow preventer device at their service connection or at a location approved by Sarasota County Utilities. All non-metered fire line connections to Sarasota County's water system are required to install at minimum a Double Detector Check Assembly (DDC).

In accordance with FDEP regulations, Sarasota County has conducted a survey to determine which utilities customers require backflow preventers. Over the past year, it has been notifying residents by letter if water sources on their property require them to install a backflow prevention device. Meetings have also been held with individual homeowners association groups to familiarize them with the new program.

For more information about backflow devices, visit scgov.net and click on Backflow Prevention. The Web site has complete residential and commercial requirements, as well as helpful links to county and state ordinances and frequently asked questions. Residents can also contact the Sarasota County Call Center at (941) 861-5000 and ask for Utilities Customer Service.