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By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader In accordance with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, all community users of a public water for a sprinkler system are required to have an approved program for the detection and eliminations of cross connections and prevention of backflow.



In the next couple of weeks, the City of Liberal's water department will conduct a survey of all automatic sprinkler systems. A list will then be created of all citizens and businesses who are required by KDHE to have an approved backflow prevention devices. Bernie Kitten of the Liberal Water Department said the device commonly used for this purpose is a pressure vacuum breaker, and many people already have them.

"They're the little things that come up above ground where your control system is," he said. "The outlet of that device has to be 12 inches above the highest sprinkler head in the yard. If your control system's on the bottom part of the yard, that device has to be 12 inches above the high point."

Kitten said anyone with an automatic lawn sprinkler system is required to have backflow prevention.

"It is to protect from any lawn chemicals coming back through the system and getting into the public drinking water system," he said.

Kitten said homeowners are most in danger of backflow.

"If there is a main break and we turn off the water pressure and they're watering the lawn at that time, anytime the lawn sprinklers open, it will come backwards," he said. "How far will it come backwards? Probably back to the main."

Kitten said water that comes out of the lawn and back into the system will likely stay in the homeowner's piping.

"When the pressure comes back on, that first water is going to go right back into their house," he said. "It's a real danger, and these devices prevent that."

The backflow requirements are mandated under the federal Clean Water Act.

"We're just trying to get it implemented," Kitten said. "Most people already have it. Some people aren't familiar with it."

Kitten said the water department's goal for now is to simply get a list of everyone who should have a backflow prevention device. He said the department is not issuing citations.

“All we’re doing at this point is trying to collect the data and say these are the people that need them,” he said. “Once we get that done, we’ll send out letters and tell them they need to get them with plenty of time. We’ll follow that up, and eventually, we’ll start tracking everything.”

Kitten was unsure of the exact price of a device, but he said they can be purchased from plumbers or plumbing supply stores. He said individuals can install the devices themselves, but in order to connect to the public water supply system, they will need to have a certified plumber.

“Lawn sprinklers can be done without a certified plumber, but you have to have a plumber come out and make that connection,” he said. “You can do the work, and he can make the last connection.”

Kitten said commercial installations demand a Reduced Pressure Zone backflow preventer.

“It’s comprised of three valves – two check valves that are spring loaded and a middle valve,” he said. “If the pressure drops between the two, that means there’s something coming backwards, and it will dump that contaminant onto the floor.”

After the list is comprised, Kitten said the water department is planning to educate the public more about the process. He added when a new house is built with a sprinkler system, officials with the city’s building department check for a backflow device.

“They make them get a permit to put in, and they do inspect it initially,” he said. “A lot of people aren’t testing annually, so we need to start making sure they test annually.”

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