



The Public Drinking Water Threat No One is Talking About

Conducted February 2025

Overview

A national survey to assess American homeowners’ awareness and understanding of backflow preventers and their role in maintaining municipal water cleanliness.

The survey aimed to:

- Measure awareness and understanding of residential backflow preventers.
- Explore perceptions of homeowners’ roles in municipal water safety.
- Identify knowledge gaps and barriers to adoption.

The findings are intended to inform public education strategies and improve communication around water safety.

Methodology

- Survey Format: Online survey (5–8 minutes) via Qualtrics.
- Sample Size: 1,003 U.S. adults.
- Eligibility Criteria:
 - Must own a single-family home.
 - Must be on a public water supply.
 - Must be a financial or maintenance decision-maker.
 - Minimum household income: \$45,000.
- Confidence Level: 95% significance testing applied.

Respondent Demographics

Gender	Age Distribution	Region	Household Income
Male: 40.7%	25–34 years: 19.4%	Midwest: 25.7%	\$45,000–\$74,999: 35.1%
Female: 59.3%	35–44 years: 20.0%	Northeast: 26.5%	\$75,000–\$99,999: 24.7%
	45–54 years: 20.2%	South: 25.8%	\$100,000–\$124,999: 14.5%
	55–64 years: 20.0%	West: 25.7%	\$125,000–\$149,999: 9.7%
	65 years +: 20.2%		\$150,000–\$174,999: 6.4%
		Type of Area	\$175,000–\$199,999: 4.0%
		Urban: 16.3%	\$200,000 and up: 5.7%
		Suburban: 59.5%	
		Rural: 24.2%	

Key Takeaways

Awareness & Understanding

- 2 out of 3 homeowners have never heard of backflow preventers.
- Those familiar with backflow preventers are more likely to believe they should be required.
- 20% of homeowners aware of backflow preventers don't know if they have one.
- Once educated 73% of homeowners believe backflow preventers should be necessary and tested annually.

Perceptions of Responsibility

- 90% of homeowners believe they have some responsibility for public water safety.
- 66% of homeowners think municipalities should prevent contamination from homes.
- 56% of homeowners say it is very important that their household plays a role in maintaining safe public water, indicating a strong sense of civic duty despite uncertainty on specific actions.
- After learning about backflow preventers, nearly half of respondents shifted to believing homeowners should maintain them.
- Homeowners are split on who should test the devices; municipalities or themselves.

Education

- 80% of homeowners feel their local municipality has not properly educated them on backflow prevention.
- Preferred education methods include utility bill inserts (65%), mailed flyers and annual reminders (47%).
- Younger homeowners (ages 25-44) were significantly more likely to say that online resources and incentive programs would be most helpful in educating them on backflow prevention.
- Homeowners 65 and older said they would prefer inserts/attachment or mailed flyers.

Survey Questions and Responses

Q1 – Q9 Covered demographic data

Q10: How confident are you in the safety of the water supplied to your home?

- Very confident: 46%
- Somewhat confident: 46%
- Not confident: 8%

Q11: How much responsibility do you believe homeowners like yourself have in maintaining the safety of the public water supply?

- A great deal: 40%
- A little: 47%
- None at all: 13%

Q12: In your opinion, who is responsible for ensuring the water coming into your home is safe? (*Select all that apply*)

- Local Municipality / Water Utility: 92%
- Federal Government: 25%
- Homeowners: 21%
- Not sure: 1%

Q13: Who do you think should be responsible for preventing contamination from your home entering back into the public water supply?

- Local Municipality / Water Utility: 63%
- Homeowner: 32%
- Not sure: 5%

Q14: How familiar are you with the processes municipalities use to keep the public water supply safe?

- Very familiar: 11%
- Somewhat familiar: 48%
- Not familiar at all: 41%

Q15: What actions, if any, do you take as a household to ensure the water in your home remains safe? (*Open-ended responses grouped*)

- Use of water filtration systems
- Avoiding chemical contamination
- Regular water testing and monitoring
- Plumbing maintenance
- Relying on local water authorities
- 25% take no action

Q16: What actions, if any, can you take as a household to ensure the public water in your community remains safe? (*Open-ended responses grouped*)

- Proper disposal of chemicals & waste
- Testing & filtering water at home
- Staying informed & holding officials accountable
- Avoiding pollution & littering
- Uncertainty / lack of awareness

Q17: Rate your level of concern about potential contamination entering your home's water supply.

- Extremely concerned: 18%
- Somewhat concerned: 54%
- Not concerned at all: 28%

Q18: Rate your level of concern about potential contaminants coming from your home's water supply and contaminating the public water supply.

- Extremely concerned: 15%
- Somewhat concerned: 37%
- Not concerned at all: 49%

Q19: Have you experienced water quality issues in your home?

- Yes: 17%
- No: 83%

Q20: How important is it to you that your household contributes to maintaining safe public water in your community?

- Very important: 56%
- Somewhat important: 40%
- Not important at all: 4%

Q21: How often do you have maintenance or inspections performed on plumbing systems in your home?

- Regularly (once a year or more): 15%
- Occasionally (every 1–2 years): 27%
- Rarely (every 3–5 years): 36%
- Never: 21%

Q22: How familiar are you with the term “backflow” as it relates to household plumbing?

- Very familiar: 20%
- Somewhat familiar: 48%
- Not familiar at all: 32%

Q23: Have you heard of a backflow preventer before today?

- Yes: 34%
- No: 66%

Q24: How did you first learn about backflow preventers? (*Open-ended responses grouped*)

- Plumbing professionals
- Work-related exposure
- Homeownership or plumbing issues
- Online research or news
- Municipal communications

Q25: Does your primary residence currently have a backflow preventer? (*Only asked to those aware of backflow preventers*)

- Yes: 41%
- No: 38%
- Not sure: 20%

Q26: Who do you think is responsible for ensuring backflow preventers are installed and maintained at a home?

- Homeowners: 48%
- Local Municipality / Water Utility: 37%
- Not sure: 14%

Q27: How much of a role does a backflow preventer play in ensuring the public water supply remains free of contamination?

- A great deal: 46%
- A little: 31%
- None at all: 2%
- Not sure: 21%

Q28: Before today, were you aware that a malfunctioning backflow preventer could result in contaminants entering the drinking water supply?

- Yes: 31%
- No: 69%

Q29: If the backflow preventer at your home were to fail and the public water supply was polluted, who should be held responsible?

- Local Municipality / Water Utility: 41%
- Homeowner: 34%
- Not sure: 25%

Q30: Do you believe backflow preventers are necessary for residential homes on a public water supply?

- Yes: 73%
- No: 27%

Q31: How often should a backflow preventer be tested to confirm it is functioning properly?

- Every year: 49%
- Every 6 months: 22%
- Every two years: 20%
- More than two years: 7%
- Never: 3%

Q32: Do you currently pay to have your backflow preventer tested? *(Only asked to those aware of their backflow preventer)*

- Yes: 45%
- No: 55%

Q33: Who do you think is responsible to have a backflow preventer tested?

- Local Municipality / Water Utility: 45%
- Homeowner: 44%
- Not sure: 11%

Q34: Do you feel that your local municipality has properly educated you on the role and importance of backflow prevention?

- No: 81%
- Yes: 19%

Q35: Which of the following materials from your local municipality would be the most helpful in educating you on the importance of backflow prevention? *(Multiple selections allowed)*

- Water utility bill inserts: 65%
- Mailed flyers: 47%
- Annual reminders: 47%
- Incentive programs: 42%
- Online resources: 39%
- Community events: 19%
- Other: 2%

For additional questions, press releases, or interview requests, please visit <http://watts.com/backflowsurvey>

