

AMERICAN BACKFLOW PREVENTION ASSOCIATION BACKFLOW PREVENTION ASSEMBLY TESTER CERTIFICATION HISTORY

The Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester is needed by administrative authorities throughout North America to assure that installed backflow prevention assemblies continue to protect the drinking water. The American Backflow Prevention Association (ABPA) Certification Committee (previously known as the Training Committee or the Training and Education Committee) completed the task of establishing criteria for what a Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester needs to know. Once a person has been trained, an examination protocol had to be developed to verify the applicant's knowledge against this need to know criteria. The applicant must also be able to demonstrate their ability to test and diagnose the operation of the different types of backflow prevention assemblies.

THE PAST

ABPA is an organization dedicated to providing its members with the appropriate tools to implement and run an effective cross connection control program. One tool that was requested was a Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester written examination. This would allow a local instructor to administer an examination to a student in order to help evaluate their understanding of the basic principles that a tester needed to know. The written test was developed and sold to instructors around the country who needed a written examination for their classes, however the written examination did not offer any type of certification. In 1990 questions began to arise about the many different tester course outlines the instructors around the country utilized and the ability of this single written examination to properly judge the students comprehension of the subject matter. The written examination needed to be changed to meet this need.

Before the examination could be properly modified there had to be consistency in training. The need to establish a course outline with a consistent core of information became necessary to assure that the many different instructors were teaching the same material. In 1992 the Certification Committee completed the task of developing the Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester Course Outline. With the completed course outline a balanced examination commensurate with the course outline was developed to assure that the tester demonstrated their comprehension of the subject matter. The Committee further saw the need to assure that the written examination was secure and not passed around in an unauthorized fashion. The Committee developed a bank of questions to draw from so that different written examinations could be developed to assure confidentiality. All these modifications are done to reflect standard industry practices for written examinations.

Many instructors around North America have utilized the ABPA Tester Course Outline and also purchased the original ABPA written examination which was administered to their students. However, this process was not intended to certify the individual as a backflow prevention assembly tester. Many administrative authorities around the country expressed the need for a certification program that they could rely on to demonstrate the tester's understanding of the need to know requirements contained in the Tester Course Outline, and their ability to perform a field test. ABPA was asked to develop and administer such a certification program. In 1992 the ABPA Certification Committee was given the task to develop this program which incorporates a performance or hands on demonstration of the tester's ability to properly conduct a field test of a backflow prevention assembly. The Committee saw the need to develop the written and performance examination guidelines so that the examinations are complete in content and administered fairly.

With the Tester Course Outline, the written examination bank of questions, and the written and performance examination guidelines developed, the Committee was asked in 1993 to tie the whole package together and establish a National Voluntary Certification Program for the backflow prevention assembly tester. The Committee developed the set of Rules for the administration of the process to acquire an ABPA backflow assembly tester certification and presented the Certification Program to the ABPA Board of Directors on January 23, 1994, at which time it was unanimously approved and implementation began immediately. The ABPA Board of Directors on September 27, 2003, established the ABPA Certification Committee to replace the duties of the existing Training Committee.

DETAILS OF THE PROGRAM

The ABPA Backflow Prevention Assembly Voluntary Certification Program was drawn up on a consensus basis to assure it properly reflected the needs of administrative authorities throughout the country. The Committee was made up of a balance between instructors, water works officials, plumbing officials, and backflow prevention professionals.

The Committee started with the ABPA Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester Need-To-Know Criteria. In re-evaluating it, they confirmed that it still presented the need to know criteria for an applicant who wishes to operate as a backflow prevention assembly tester. The six sections of the Need-To-Know Criteria were evaluated and weighted by percentage. Existing industry practices suggested that 100 questions exam were standard for the written exam. A 100 question written examination was then constructed of questions using the same percentage as the Need-To-Know Criteria. The Committee agreed that the

written examination must be kept secure and not distributed indiscriminately. For the written examination to properly reflect the applicant's understanding of the subject it is important that the applicant not see the written examination before the exam is administered. For the test to be valid, the applicant shall not be allowed to see the written examination before or after the test. To further assure the examination validity, an ABPA appointed third party examination monitor or proctor shall be appointed by the Administrator to hand carry the written examinations into the test site and to administer a closed book examination. The examination monitor will grade the written examinations on site and return the written examinations to ABPA. The applicant would be notified of their pass/fail status by the examination monitor. In this way, no copies of the written examination could be accidentally put in circulation to compromise the security of the written examination.

Once the applicant successfully passes the written examination, the applicant would be required to take the ABPA performance examination. The closed book performance examination is designed to evaluate the applicant's ability to perform a field test on a reduced pressure principle backflow prevention assembly, a double check backflow prevention assembly, and a pressure vacuum breaker. (Beginning January 2004, the spill resistant pressure vacuum breaker will be added to the written and performance examinations.) This performance examination would be administered by an ABPA appointed third party proctor, that is, someone other than the teacher or instructor. ABPA Proctors must comply with the requirements detailed in the ABPA Proctor Qualifications.

When the applicant passes both the written and performance examinations they are issued an ABPA Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester Certificate which is valid for three years from the date of issuance. After three years the tester would have to re-certify by participating in a written and performance examination in the same manner as the initial examination to demonstrate their continued understanding and ability to perform a field test.

The ABPA tester certification is subject to revocation by the ABPA Board of Directors upon submission of conclusive evidence of fraud, deceit, gross negligence or misconduct in the performance of their duties as a tester. The ABPA Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester Certification Program is a voluntary program. ABPA developed this program at the direct request of its Members to meet their needs. It is up to the local administrative authority to recognize a certificate as valid in their area of jurisdiction.

In 1994, ABPA appointed Mr. Ernest Havlina to act as the Administrator of this voluntary certification program. His duties include evaluation of tester applications, administering examinations, issuing certificates, and performing associated duties of the Backflow Assembly Tester Certification Program. Mr. Havlina is well known throughout the country and has almost 50 years experience in cross-connection control. He has experience as a cross connection control program administrator and a certification administrator. ABPA is extremely lucky to be able to get someone with his level of experience and expertise. Mr. Havlina was involved with the ABPA Certification Committee when the Rules were developed. He was not an official member of the Certification Committee but was invaluable in the drafting of the program Rules. As Administrator of the Program Mr. Havlina will be able to answer any administrative authority's questions on the ABPA Certification Program.

The value of the ABPA Certification to a tester is that they can possess a certificate that demonstrates their understanding of the basic need to know criteria and the ability to perform a field test of the backflow prevention assemblies.

It is the Certification Committee's hope that we have been able to answer your questions on the ABPA Backflow Prevention Assembly Tester Voluntary Certification Program. Testers who have any questions should contact their administrative authority regarding testing certification requirements in their local area. Administrative authorities interested in additional information should contact Mr. Havlina. ABPA is proud to present this latest benefit to the cross-connection control community.

For more information about the Program may be found at the ABPA web site: www.abpa.org.
