

Real Estate Journal

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Question of the Month: How should buildings respond to the DEP backflow prevention enforcement campaign?

New York City's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is on a mission to protect our drinking water. The campaign to enforce the state requirements for backflow prevention devices may have costly consequences for many of the city's property owners. DEP inspectors are making the rounds and handing out notices requiring the installation of these devices on all water service lines to a long list of properties throughout the city, from high-rises to hospitals. This enforcement campaign affects over 100,000 buildings in the five boroughs, and if you are wondering if it affects yours, the answer is probably "yes."

Backflow preventers stop potentially contaminated water or chemicals from flowing back into the public drinking water supply system. Most properties in New York City require these devices, because they fall into one of the categories on the city's list. These include all buildings with, among other things: boilers that use chemical treatment; water-cooled equipment or chillers; commercial or public kitchens; laundries or dry cleaners; medical or dental offices; as well as, many other types of commercial and residential properties.

Buildings that receive a compliance letter from New York City DEP will have 30 days to initiate the process of installation, which requires the services of a licensed professional engineer or registered architect. Failure to comply can lead to fines of up to \$2,000 and, if ignored, the city can shut off the water supply to the building. According to the DEP, the cost of installation ranges from \$3,000 for a one-story building to around \$35,000 for high-rises. Buildings with more complicated situations, such as elevated building drains or roof tanks that will require more powerful pumps after backflow prevention devices are installed, can face even higher costs.

Building owners, boards and managers that initiate the process before receiving a letter from DEP will have more time to resolve a potentially expensive and complex problem. Varsity has been working with dozens of properties throughout the city, providing a turn-key package that provides the required services from start to finish. For this "one-call-does-it-all" program, Varsity has enlisted the exclusive services of a licensed professional engineer who has given us an unbeatable price and we are happy to pass that discount along to our customers.

Varsity's fully licensed team includes an engineer and master plumber to do the analysis, file the plans, install and test the required devices and complete the follow-up paperwork, ensuring that all city codes and regulations are met. At Varsity, we provide a one-call solution to this issue, from engineering to installation to testing compliance, simplifying a very complex process for building owners.

Some management firms have been overwhelmed with the prospect of getting inspections done and contracts in place for all their buildings within the DEP's 30-day time frame. But as soon as a company has requested a proposal from Varsity, their team sends

out an immediate request for a 30-day compliance extension from DEP. Once the proposal has been accepted by the building, Varsity's engineer sends a follow-up letter to DEP explaining that his services have been retained, the process of compliance is under way, and requesting 90 days more to file the plans and applications. Once the plans are filed and approved by DEP, the installation can be done. Afterwards, Varsity's licensed master plumber (LMP) and professional engineer (PE) perform the required testing and inspection, and file the required reports with DEP and NYSDOH for final approval. Once this entire process has been completed, your building is in full compliance with the state backflow prevention regulations.



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