

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Shad S. Springer, Director of Utilities

DATE: May 5, 2026

SUBJECT: Introduction of an Ordinance Amending Chapters 8-10A (Cross-Connections) and 8-1.07 (Appeals) of Title 8 of the Santa Maria Municipal Code

Description:

The City Council will consider introducing an Ordinance amending Chapters 8-10A (Cross-Connections) and Chapter 8-1.07 (Appeals) of Title 8 of the Santa Maria Municipal Code.

Environmental Notice: The activity is not a “Project” as defined under Section 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act State Guidelines; therefore, pursuant to State Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) no environmental review is required.

RECOMMENDATION:

The City Council to:

1. Waive first reading and introduce an Ordinance amending Chapter 8-10A and Chapter 8-1 of Title 8 of the Santa Maria Municipal Code concerning Cross-Connections and Applications for Public Service; and
2. Set for adoption at the next regular City Council meeting.

SUMMARY:

The City of Santa Maria Utilities Department is presenting the Cross-Connection Control Plan (Plan) and corresponding ordinance updates, to implement a risk-based program for preventing backflow and protecting drinking water quality. The Plan defines schedules for hazard assessments, tester certifications, testing requirements, enforcement, recordkeeping, and public outreach. The Ordinance updates Title 8 (Attachment A) provide the definitions, authority, responsibilities, and enforcement tools needed for City implementation.

BACKGROUND:

Cross-connections are actual or potential links between the drinking water system and non-potable sources that could allow contaminants to enter the potable (drinking) supply. Examples include irrigation systems, fire sprinkler systems, or industrial processes connected to the potable water system. Backflow occurs when water flows in reverse, often due to pressure changes, allowing non-potable water or substances to migrate into the potable water system, which can lead to contamination of the system.

Santa Maria has experienced no known backflow incidents and the City's program has long emphasized prevention, routine testing, and corrective action to protect residents, businesses, schools, and commercial facilities including healthcare sites. However, to ensure consistent public health protection, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted the Cross-Connection Control Policy Handbook (Handbook) on December 19, 2023, effective July 1, 2024, replacing relevant portions of Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations.

The City submitted its draft Plan in June 2025 to the Division of Drinking Water (DDW). After minor technical revisions in Fall 2025, the DDW approved the Plan in January 2026 (Attachment B), with the expectation that the City adopt the enabling ordinances in early 2026 and implement the Plan. The most current version of the Plan will remain on file with the Utilities Department.

The City's existing framework (SMMC Title 8-10A and Engineering Standards) already includes regular testing, record keeping, and enforcement. The existing SMMC must be amended to reflect the changes required by the State through its replacement of portions of Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations and to provide specific sections required by the Handbook. Implementation of the Plan and updated ordinance formalizes these practices, clarifies responsibilities, and sets timelines consistent with City water operations, customer needs, and State requirements.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the Handbook is the protection of public health through the establishment of standards intended to ensure a potable water system will not be subject to backflow. The Handbook mandates the Plan (Attachment C) be adopted by the City that outlines how it will implement the requirements of the Handbook. The Plan includes administrative procedures, inspection schedules, testing protocols, enforcement mechanisms, and customer education strategies.

The City's Plan contains the following key components as required by the Handbook:

- **Hazard Assessments and Scheduling**. The Plan establishes risk-based hazard assessments at each service connection, paced at approximately 500 assessments per year. Milestones are set for non-residential connections by the end of 2031, higher-risk residential connections by July 1, 2034, and all remaining residential connections by the end of 2071.
- **Qualifications and Testing**. To ensure quality and consistency, the City will maintain a list of pre-approved backflow prevention assembly testers and certified cross-connection control specialists. The Plan clarifies testing frequency, performance standards, and accountability. The responsible party, typically the property owner, must test, maintain, and repair assemblies on schedule, while the City oversees program integrity, supports customer communication, and tracks compliance.

- Enforcement and Risk Management. The updated ordinance provides the City with clear authority to address elevated risks when hazards are not abated or assemblies are not inspected, tested, or maintained. Enforcement will use graduated notices and reasonable compliance windows, reserving service disconnection as a last resort, and focusing on risk reduction and continuity of service for residents and businesses.
- Record Keeping and Transparency. Consolidated records of assessments, site classifications, installations, test results, and enforcement allow staff to identify trends, respond quickly to issues, and report program performance.

Most customers will experience minimal change because the City already operates a mature program. However, some existing single-family residences constructed since 2011, with certain fire sprinkler configurations (approximately 1,500 homes), may require a backflow prevention assembly or system modifications by July 1, 2034, to meet current standards. Customer costs will be site-specific, driven by hazard classifications and device needs identified during assessments. Targeted outreach will provide residents and businesses advance notice and clear guidance, enabling them to plan compliance alongside routine maintenance cycles.

To minimize further impacts, City standards for residential fire sprinkler systems have been updated so that future single-family homes with sprinklers will not require a backflow prevention assembly under current design practices.

Related amendments to Santa Maria Municipal Code Title 8 are proposed to clarify City authority and customer responsibilities and align recordkeeping and reporting to the Plan's timelines). If introduced, staff will return at the next regular City Council Meeting for adoption. Staff will also finalize outreach materials, publish the pre-approved tester list, and schedule hazard assessments per the Plan.

Alternatives

The City Council may:

1. Direct staff to revise the Ordinance prior to introduction. This is not recommended because it will extend the schedule, require rerouting through internal City reviews, delay first reading and adoption, and postpone program activities. In addition, the Ordinance was drafted to meet specific requirements of the State.
2. Delay action, noting potential impacts on scheduling and staffing for hazard assessments and customer communications. This is not recommended because it could delay required hazard assessment milestones (non-residential by 2031; higher-risk residential by July 1, 2034; remaining residential by 2071) or compress future workload, increasing staffing, overtime, and contractor costs. Furthermore, the timeline identified in the Plan was the most flexible that DDW would allow.

Fiscal Considerations

City implementation including staff training, public outreach, and periodic inspections, will be funded through user fees and adopted water rates. Spreading hazard assessments over multiple years smooths operational impacts and cost, limiting overtime and contractor dependence.

Impact on the Community

The Plan reinforces a safe, reliable drinking water system and provides clear expectations for residents and businesses.

Attachment(s)

- A. Ordinance
- B. State Water Resources Control Board Approval Letter dated 1/8/26
- C. Cross-Connection Control Plan-April 2026