



By Sean Cleary, Vice President of Industry Programs and BPI Operations

This year on August 16, 2024 is the fourth annual National Backflow Prevention Day. It is a day to celebrate everyone who works behind the scenes protecting the water systems we depend on each and every day. These are things most people simply take for granted. On this day we celebrate the plumbers, pipefitters, and sprinkler fitters who build and maintain the water systems within our facilities. Included are the waste and water industry people who process our water and send it out for delivery to our homes and businesses. We have certified backflow testers and specialists, inspectors, educators, manufacturers, designers, code developers, and the list goes on. All of these people working to ensure the end user receives clean safe potable water from the source to the last free flowing tap in any system.

Each and every piece of the puzzle needs to be in place for the system to work. We do not play the odds in the cross-connection control industry. We leave nothing to chance. If backflow is possible

under any hydraulic condition we must do whatever is necessary to prevent it. There is no glory in what we do, when we get everything right, nothing happens, the water system is protected. As a result, we must work to ensure the necessary protection is installed, maintained, tested, and most importantly remains in place. Every day is another chance to educate the industry and the general public on the importance of backflow prevention and cross-connection control.

This date that was chosen as the National Backflow Prevention Day is not an anniversary of our success, it is an anniversary of a failure. A cross-connection that allowed backflow to occur and resulted in the death of a least ninety-eight people and the serious illness of more than fifteen hundred people at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. This event was one of the deadliest backflow incidents ever to occur in the United States. The decision to use this date, this anniversary of a tragedy is to use this day to raise awareness of these issues. To make it clear we need to always be vigilant, to always be forward thinking, and always promote the importance of cross-connection control and backflow prevention programs.

For those of us in the industry August 16th is a day to reflect on the how far we have come since 1933. To reflect on how much illness and death our work has prevented. On how our work has made economic growth and progress possible, has helped in cleaning up our environment, has increased the quality of life of people across our nation. It is also a day for us to look to the future with the understanding that our work is not finished. In truth it will never be finished since we are the people who establish the programs, monitor our water systems, and ensure continued protection of water systems. As systems continue to become more complicated and as the use of alternate water systems has expanded, the importance of cross-connection control and backflow prevention is more critical than ever. Now is not the time to rest, it is the time to redouble our efforts to ensure the proper protection is in place and maintained.

So let us celebrate the day and celebrate the work we do. We make a difference in people's lives each and every day. We protect the health and safety of the nation. We are the unsung heroes of water safety. In the movie Argo there is a scene where they tell a CIA agent that he has earned the Distinguished Intelligence Cross, the highest decoration awarded by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. They then tell him he cannot tell anyone about it because its classified. His supervisor then tells him if he wanted applause he should have "Joined the Circus." People working in

the cross-connection control industry do not look for glory or praise. They do it because it is the right thing to do.

I spend my days at the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials Backflow Prevention Institute teaching people about the importance of cross-connection control and backflow prevention. We work hard to instill in each student a passion for the work and make them understand how critical the work they do is. As we celebrate National Backflow Prevention Day, I would encourage everyone to become more involved in the groups promoting the industry. IAPMO, ASSE, ABPA, AWWA, TREEO, NEWWA, ASPE and countless other associations are there to provide guidance and networking opportunities.

Each and every one of us is an ambassador for our industry. Use the tools available and make a difference. On the day that we celebrate the work we do and the people who do it let us commit to work harder and to doing better. The work we do is far too important for us to do less. John Quincy Adams once said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." I hope in the people I have taught over these many years, I have at least on a small scale done that. I hope you will join me in this effort each and every day. Become a mentor and a leader in the cross-connection industry.



BACKFLOW PREVENTION INSTITUTE

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