

16. - BACKFLOW AT A MORTUARY

DATE OF BACKFLOW INCIDENT: ?

LOCATION OF BACKFLOW INCIDENT: ?

SOURCE(S) OF INFORMATION:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Cross-Connection Control Manual, 1989

CASE HISTORY

The chief plumbing inspector in a large southern city received a telephone call advising that blood was coming from drinking fountains at a mortuary (i.e., a funeral home). Plumbing and health inspectors went to the scene and found evidence that blood had been circulating in the potable water system within the funeral home. They immediately ordered the funeral home cut off from the public water system at the meter. City water and plumbing officials did not think that the water contamination problem had spread beyond the funeral home, but they sent inspectors into the neighborhood to check for possible contamination. Investigation revealed that blood had backflowed through a hydraulic aspirator into the potable water system at the funeral home.

The funeral home had been using a hydraulic aspirator to drain fluids from bodies as part of the embalming process. The aspirator was directly connected to a faucet at a sink in the embalming room. Water flow through the aspirator created suction used to draw body fluids through a needle and hose attached to the aspirator. When funeral home personnel used the aspirator during a period of low water pressure, the potable water system at the funeral home became contaminated. Instead of body fluids flowing into the wastewater system, they were drawn in the opposite direction--into the potable water system.