

the Repair Guys



In our line of work, we field questions from contractors and technicians concerning repairs, installations, and general backflow prevention practices. We'd like to share some questions we receive and our answers. Everyone has different opinions on these subjects and we would like to hear yours. Contact us with your questions and ideas via email at: imark@backflowparts.com or mail us at American Backflow Products Co., Post Office Box 37025, Tallahassee, FL 32315.

— Mark Inman and Jason Gregg

QUESTION:

I am a plumbing contractor and I test and repair backflow prevention assemblies. I do my best to repair a $\frac{3}{4}$ -1" assembly when it fails, but I find myself, at times, spending more time and money trying to repair the unit than if I had replaced it in the first place. Is there a guideline or general practice that is used to determine if I should repair an assembly or replace it?

Mark -

This is a very common question. Every technician that has any amount of experience has run into this same problem, so you are not alone.

We can approach this question based on the size of the assembly because the replacement cost of large and small units varies drastically. We will consider $\frac{3}{4}$ through 2 inch units as small, and 2½ through 10 inch units as large. Basically, there is no rule or published guideline to answer the question of repair versus replace. Usually when dealing with small assemblies, it is easier and less expensive to repair than to replace, unless there is damage to the valve body. It basically all comes down to the experience level of the technician and his judgment based on the situation.

The key for any technician, is to develop a working knowledge of that model of assembly. Knowing what to expect when you go into that assembly will help you accurately calculate the labor cost to repair that assembly. Then the next step is to compare the pricing of the parts against a new unit.

- Jason

The automotive industry has a Chilton's manual that gives guidelines to mechanics as to the amount of chargeable time it should take an experienced mechanic to complete a repair on a particular vehicle. The manual will help them determine how much the repair labor will cost, which is half the battle. Unfortunately, the backflow industry does not have such a manual. Each technician will develop and compare his repair labor cost and replacement labor cost.

The cost of repair labor can be an unknown, so it can be harder to determine. Repair labor will be variable depending on how familiar the technician is with the assembly. Replacement labor cost, many times, can be pretty straight forward because the technician can actually see the installation and what it will take to replace it. If a technician is familiar with a unit, he may be able to open clean or replace rubber parts in 10 minutes compared to the 30 minutes it may take to remove and reinstall a new assembly.

Mark-

The cost of repair parts and the cost of a new assembly should be considered as well.



- Jason

If I hired a contractor to fix a leak in my kitchen faucet, I would expect him to have the experience to repair it first, with maybe a washer, before he just decided to replace the complete fixture. As backflow prevention technicians, we should have the ability and experience to do the same for our customers.

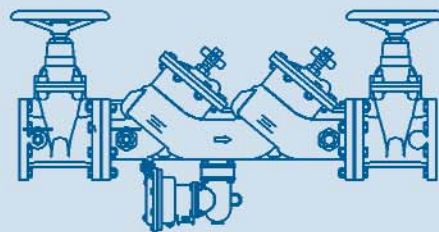
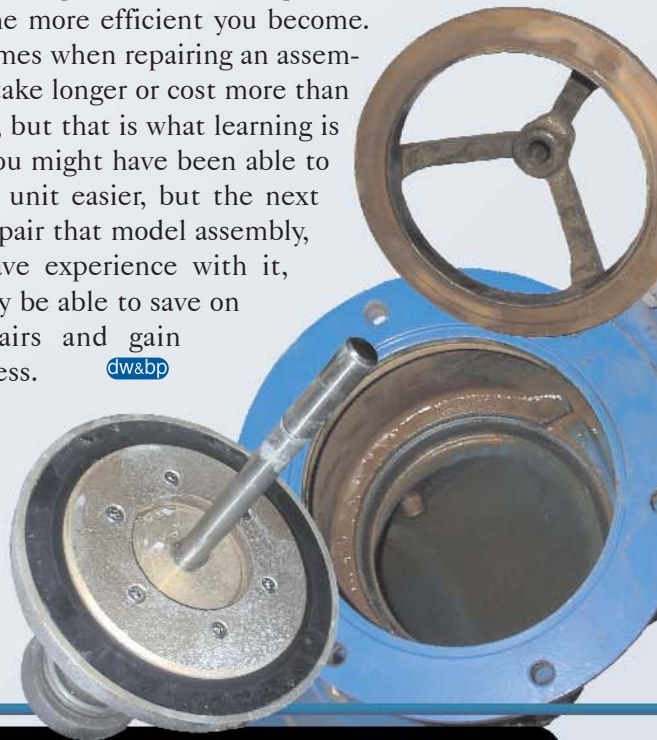
Like anything else, the more practice you have the more efficient you become. Yes, sometimes when repairing an assembly, it may take longer or cost more than anticipated, but that is what learning is all about. You might have been able to replace the unit easier, but the next time you repair that model assembly, you will have experience with it, and you may be able to save on future repairs and gain more business. dw&bp

Purchasing backflow repair parts can be like auto parts in the fact that if you were to buy every single part of the unit you will spend more than if you bought a new replacement. It is important to know what repair parts and kits each manufacturer offers.

Most manufacturers offer their parts and components in separate kits, so you do not have to purchase things you do not need. This certainly will help if you only need to price a simple rubber kit and you do not need the poppets and springs.

One thing to remember is that the price for a comparable part from each manufacturer can vary widely. It is always a good idea to contact your parts supplier on pricing for each make and model and not assume that the prices are the same. Once you have a good idea about the cost of the parts, you can compare that to the price of a new assembly.

Be aware that the parts for some older units are becoming obsolete. If there is a possibility that parts for that assembly may not be available in the near future, it is a good idea to consider replacing the assembly.



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