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Building Services – Chief Building Official code interpretation:

The following is a building code interpretation by the Chief Building Official explaining the intent and requirement of a specific code section that is not entirely clear and not concisely explained in the code.

Issue: Enforcement of backwater valves on existing installations.

**2018 IRC
Section P3008
Backwater Valves**

P3008.1 Where required. Where the flood level rims of plumbing fixtures are below the elevation of the manhole cover of the next upstream manhole in the public sewer, the fixtures shall be protected by a backwater valve installed in the building drain, branch of the building drain or horizontal branch serving such fixtures.

P3008.2 Allowable installations. Where plumbing fixtures are installed on a floor with a finished floor elevation above the elevation of the manhole cover of the next upstream manhole in the public sewer, and a backwater valve is installed in the building drain or horizontal branch serving such fixtures, the backwater valve shall be of the normally open type.

Exception: Normally closed backwater valve installations for existing buildings shall not be prohibited.

Conclusion: Section P3008 applies to new work only. If a contractor and/or homeowner are completing new work that meets the criteria of P3008.1, a backwater valve shall be required. If there is existing plumbing that has not been altered or replaced, a backwater valve shall not be required.

After-the-fact basements: Due to the concealed construction form requirements and the non-destructive nature of after the fact basement finish permits, a backwater valve shall not be required as the work is existing and concealed at the time of permitting/inspections.

Warning to Homeowners: Owners that chose not to install a backflow preventer on existing, non-protected plumbing fixtures, i.e., (floor drain or otherwise), are accepting the risk of property damage from sewage backflow.

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