CALGARY PLUMBING PRO

Water Supply & Softeners

Calgary's hard water, water softeners and filters, water pressure, main shut-off valves, the water service line and backflow prevention

4 Expert Answers from Plumbing IQ

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Q1

Between my house and the street, who owns the Calgary water line?

The City of Calgary draws the line at the service valve, which sits at or near the property line. From that valve to the street, the water main is the City's responsibility. From that valve to your house, including everything inside, the pipe is yours to maintain and repair at your own cost.

The one exception is the water meter: repair costs on private property are the owner's, except for the meter. Everything else on the house side of the service valve, including the supply pipe running under your yard, is your financial responsibility if it needs repair or replacement.

What this means in practice

If you have a leak or a break somewhere between the house and the street, the first call is to the City to confirm exactly where the service valve sits on your property. That conversation also clarifies whether the problem is on their side or yours. If it turns out to be on your side, you will need a certified plumber to do the repair, and a plumbing permit from the City of Calgary will be required for replacing or altering that water service line.

The plumber you hire must be a certified journeyperson plumber or a registered apprentice working under one. That is a requirement under Alberta's Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, not just good practice. Before any work starts, ask to see the trade certificate, confirm the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence if they are collecting a deposit before the job is finished, and get a WCB-Alberta clearance letter showing their account is in good standing.

On cost: a water service line repair or replacement on private property is not a small job. The price depends on how deep the pipe is buried, how long the run is, what material the existing pipe is made of, and whether the ground between the house and the property line is landscaped, paved or has other utilities nearby. Get at least two written quotes before committing.

The line in any quote most likely to hide extra cost is the excavation and restoration scope: ask specifically whether backfill, compaction, sod or concrete reinstatement are included, or whether those are billed separately after the fact.

Q2

Pressure gauge on my Calgary main reads 90 psi, too high?

A reading that high is worth having a plumber look at. We do not publish a pressure figure of our own: the plumber will confirm the reading with their own gauge and tell you what the plumbing code in force in Alberta, the National Plumbing Code of Canada 2020, expects for your system.

Why High Pressure Is a Problem Here

High supply pressure puts extra stress on fixtures, supply hoses and appliance connections. Signs people notice include banging pipes, dripping taps and harsh-feeling faucets and showers.

The fix is a pressure-reducing valve (PRV) installed on the main supply line where it enters the house, or an adjustment to the existing one if you already have one. A plumber sets the valve for your house and can tell you whether the job needs a plumbing permit from the City of Calgary; altering or adding to the piping does. A homeowner who owns and lives in the home may take out a City of Calgary homeowner plumbing permit and do the work themselves; the 2026 fee is $116.50. If you hire a plumber, they take out a contractor's trade permit and the fee is calculated on construction value with a $116.50 minimum.

A plumber should also check whether an expansion tank is needed. Once a PRV is installed, the system becomes a closed loop, and thermal expansion from the water heater can spike pressure on the house side. Whether an expansion tank is required depends on the system; a plumber will assess it.

The price depends on where the main enters, how accessible the pipe is and whether any fittings need updating; plumbing labour runs about $85 to $150 an hour plus a call-out fee. Get a written quote that itemises the PRV model, the permit, and whether an expansion tank is included or priced separately.

Before calling anyone, confirm the reading is accurate: consumer pressure gauges can drift, so if you have a second gauge or can borrow one, cross-check the reading at an outdoor hose bib or a laundry connection. Also locate your main shut-off inside the house so you know where it is if you ever need it in a hurry. That is the one valve that is yours to operate at any time, no tools required.

Q3

Does hard water in Calgary damage a tankless water heater?

Calgary's water is genuinely hard, and tankless water heaters feel that more than tank units do. The City of Calgary reports hardness ranging from roughly 141 to 274 mg/L depending on which treatment plant supplies your neighbourhood and the time of year, and that calcium and magnesium can leave scale inside the heat exchanger.

What hard water actually does to a tankless unit

The heat exchanger in a tankless heater brings cold water to temperature almost instantly across a narrow coil or plate. Scale builds up on those surfaces, reducing heat transfer, forcing the burner to work harder, and eventually causing the unit to fault or crack the exchanger. You may notice the hot water taking longer to reach temperature, fluctuating output, or error codes appearing more often.

Regular descaling matters with Calgary water. The process circulates a descaling solution through the heat exchanger to dissolve scale. Check your unit's manual for the interval and for any maintenance the warranty requires.

A whole-house water softener reduces scale throughout the system, but the City of Calgary notes that salt-based softeners may not suit people on sodium-reduced diets and recommends researching the option before deciding. Some homeowners use a dedicated scale-inhibiting filter on the cold inlet to the heater as a middle ground; a plumber can size that for your flow rate.

Permits and certification in Calgary: a straight like-for-like tankless swap generally does not require a permit from the City of Calgary, but if the gas line upstream of the heater's shut-off valve changes, the venting changes, or the type of heater changes (for example, moving from a natural draft tank to a direct-vent tankless), a permit is required. Gas work on any heater must be done by an Alberta-certified gasfitter or a registered apprentice working under one; this is a compulsory certification trade under Alberta's Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, and a homeowner in Calgary cannot pull a gas permit unless they hold that certification themselves.

What a fair quote for installation or replacement includes: a fixed price or clear hourly rate with a call-out fee, the specific unit by model number, any gas line or venting changes itemised separately, the permit if one is needed and who pulls it, removal and disposal of the old unit, and the warranty on both parts and labour in writing. If a gas line upgrade is needed, that adds roughly $400 to $1,500 to a tankless installation that otherwise runs about $2,200 to $5,000 supplied and installed in Calgary.

Before hiring, ask to see the gasfitter's Alberta trade certificate, confirm the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence if you are paying any deposit before the work is complete, and request a WCB-Alberta clearance letter.

A useful question for any installer: what descaling interval do they recommend for your specific unit given Calgary's water hardness, and whether that service is included in any maintenance plan they offer.

Q4

Irrigation backflow device in my Calgary yard, who tests it?

Irrigation systems connect to your drinking water supply, so the backflow preventer protecting that connection must be tested every year by a tester registered with the City of Calgary. That is not a general plumber doing a favour; it is a specific registration the City requires, and only testers on that list can issue the test report the City accepts.

What the device is and why it matters

A testable cross-connection control device (the formal name for the type used on irrigation systems) sits between your home's water supply and the irrigation piping. Without it, fertiliser, pesticides and soil bacteria could be drawn back into the drinking water line under certain pressure conditions. The City of Calgary requires these devices to be tested annually precisely because the risk is real every time the system runs.

The annual test is not optional. The City of Calgary says non-compliance could result in fines or water service interruptions.

Who installs and who tests

Installing or replacing the device requires a plumbing permit from the City of Calgary, and the work must be done by a certified journeyperson plumber or a registered apprentice working under one. Plumber and Gasfitter are compulsory certification trades in Alberta under the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, so ask to see the trade certificate before anyone touches the supply piping.

The annual test is a separate task. The tester must be registered with the City of Calgary as a cross-connection control device tester. Some plumbing companies have staff who hold both the journeyperson certificate and the tester registration; others subcontract the annual test. Either way, confirm the tester's City registration before the appointment.

What a fair quote for installation includes

If the device needs to be installed or replaced, a written quote should spell out the device model and size, the plumbing permit and inspection, labour, and whether the first annual test is included or priced separately. Ask whether the company will also handle the annual test going forward or whether you will need to find a registered tester independently each spring.

For the annual test alone, the tester should give you a written report showing the test result and the date, which is what the City requires on file.

Before you hire anyone, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate, confirm the tester's City of Calgary registration, and if any deposit changes hands before the work is done, check that the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence through Service Alberta and get the contract in writing.

Before signing, ask the plumber directly: "Are you registered with the City of Calgary as a cross-connection control device tester, or will you be bringing in someone who is?"

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Calgary Plumbing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority (the City of Calgary or your own municipality) before starting any plumbing or gas project. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **calgaryplumbingpro.com** for the latest answers.