

Manual of Water Supply Practices

M51

Air Valves: Air-Release, Air/Vacuum & Combination

Second Edition



American Water Works
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Air-Valves:

Air-Release, Air/Vacuum and Combination

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Air Valves: Air-Release, Air/Vacuum and Combination

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Production: Janice Benight

Cover design: Melanie Yamamoto

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ballun, John V., author. | American Water Works Association, issuing body.

Title: Air-release, air/vacuum, and combination air valves / by John V. Ballun.

Other titles: AWWA manual ; M51.

Description: Second edition. | Denver, CO : American Water Works Association, [2016] | Series: Manual of water supply practices ; M51 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016019688 | ISBN 9781625761767

Subjects: LCSH: Water-pipes--Valves | Air valves.

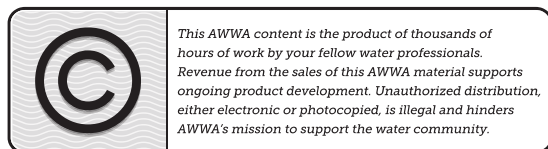
Classification: LCC TD491 .B34 2016 | DDC 628.1/5--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016019688>

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-62576-176-7

eISBN-13 978-1-61300-387-9



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Association**

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Preface



This manual is a guide for selecting, sizing, locating, and installing air valves in water and wastewater applications. Water includes raw water, potable water, and reclaimed wastewater that has been treated. Wastewater is a combination of used liquid and liquid-carried waste from residences, commercial buildings, industrial plants, and institutions, together with any groundwater infiltration, surface water, and stormwater that may enter the collection system.

The manual is a discussion of recommended practice, not an American Water Works Association (AWWA) standard. It provides guidance on generally available methods and capacity information. Questions about specific situations or applicability of specific valves should be directed to the manufacturer or supplier.

Information contained in this manual is useful to operators, technicians, and engineers for gaining a basic understanding of the use and application of air valves. There are many special liquid piping systems that are beyond the scope of the methodology given in this manual and may require special tools such as computer programs for analysis of hydraulic transients. The valve capacity information is generic information. Actual capacity charts of the intended manufacturer's valve should be consulted before making the final selection of valve size and options. The manual provides information only on the air valve types listed in ANSI/AWWA Standard C512, latest edition, including the following:

- Air-release valve
- Air/vacuum valve
- Combination air valve

Vacuum breakers, slow-closing devices, and throttling devices are also discussed in this manual. Other sources of information should be consulted for the use and application of these devices.

This second edition includes new or revised information pertaining to wastewater applications, penstocks, slow-closing devices, throttling devices, and vault products for freeze and flood protection. Also, new and alternate air valve sizing methodologies were added for partial rupture gravity flow and air-release valves.

Manufacturers graciously provided valve illustrations and other documentation. AWWA does not endorse any manufacturer's products, and the names of the manufacturers have been removed from the material provided.

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Acknowledgments

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Chapter **1**

Introduction

Air valves are hydromechanical devices designed to automatically release air and wastewater gases or admit air during the filling, draining, or operation of liquid piping systems for water and wastewater services. The safe and efficient operation of a liquid piping system is dependent on the continual removal of air and wastewater gases from the liquid piping system. This chapter includes an explanation of the effects of air and wastewater gases and their sources in liquid piping systems.

OCCURRENCE AND EFFECT OF AIR AND WASTEWATER GASES IN LIQUID PIPING SYSTEMS

Water contains approximately 2 percent dissolved air or gas by volume at standard conditions (14.7 psia [101 kPa absolute] and 60°F [16°C]) (Dean 1992) but can contain more, depending on the liquid pressure and temperature within the liquid piping system.

Wastewater systems can also contain more undissolved air and wastewater gases due to the decomposition of materials in the wastewater. Dissolved air and wastewater gases can come out of solution in pumps and in different locations along the liquid piping system where turbulence, hydraulic jumps, and other pressure variation phenomena occur. Once out of solution, air and wastewater gases will not readily dissolve and will collect in pockets at high points along the liquid piping system.

Air and wastewater gases come out of solution in a liquid piping system due to low-pressure zones created by partially open valves, cascading flow in a partially filled pipe, variations in flow velocity caused by changing pipe diameters or slopes, and changes in pipe elevation. Entrained air that reaches water service connections may be detrimental to the customer's water systems.

An air and wastewater gas pocket may reduce the flow of liquid in a liquid piping system by reducing the cross-sectional flow area of the pipe, and if the volume of the air and wastewater gas pocket is sufficient, complete binding of the liquid piping system is possible, stopping the flow of liquid (Karassik et al. 2007).

The velocity of the flow of liquid past an enlarging pocket of air and wastewater gases may only be sufficient to carry part of the pocket of air and wastewater gases downstream unless the liquid velocity is greater than the critical velocity for transporting air and wastewater gases in that particular pipe diameter (Escarameia et al. 2005). The velocity needed to scour a pocket of air and wastewater gases in larger piping systems (e.g., 24 in. [610 mm]) may be as high as 7.1 ft/sec [2.2 m/sec] at a 5 percent slope as shown in Table 1-1 (Jones et al. 2008). Although the flow velocity of the liquid may prevent the liquid piping system from complete air and wastewater gas binding, the pockets of air and wastewater gases will increase head loss in the liquid piping system (Edmunds 1979). As shown in Figure 1-1, a pocket of air and wastewater gas can reduce the flow in the pipe to d and create head loss equal to H_L due to the restricted cross section. Additional head loss in a liquid piping system decreases the flow of liquid and increases power consumption required to pump the liquid. Pockets of air and wastewater gases in a liquid piping system are difficult to detect and will reduce the liquid piping system's overall efficiency.

Pockets of air and wastewater gases may also contribute to water hammer problems, pipe breaks, system noise, and pipe corrosion—especially hydrogen sulfide corrosion—and can cause erratic operation of control valves, meters, and equipment. Studies have shown that small pockets of air and wastewater gases in certain locations along the system can cause transients and surge and/or intensify transients and surges, including down-surges (Pozos-Estrada 2007). However, temporary pockets of air and wastewater gases may be needed in special circumstances to prevent vacuum conditions in a liquid piping system after pump outages or line breaks. Vacuum conditions should be avoided as they may result in collapse and/or deformation of thin-walled pipe. Finally, on system applications, in locations where liquid column separations and returns may occur, a vacuum breaker with air-release valve or an air valve with restricted outflow (slow-closing device or throttling device) should be considered.

Table 1-1 Velocities required to scour air and wastewater gases from pipelines

Scouring Velocities by Pipe Size and Slope					
Pipe Size	Velocity, ft/sec (m/sec)				
	Negative Slope				
in. (mm)	0° (0%)	2.9° (5%)	14° (25%)	45° (50%)	90° (vertical)
4 (100)	2.7 (0.8)	2.9 (0.9)	3.1 (0.9)	3.4 (1.0)	3.5 (1.1)
8 (200)	3.8 (1.2)	4.1 (1.2)	4.4 (1.3)	4.8 (1.5)	5.0 (1.5)
12 (300)	4.7 (1.4)	5.0 (1.5)	5.4 (1.6)	5.9 (1.8)	6.1 (1.9)
24 (600)	6.6 (2.0)	7.1 (2.2)	7.6 (2.3)	8.3 (2.5)	8.6 (2.6)
36 (900)	8.1 (2.5)	8.7 (2.7)	9.3 (2.8)	10.2 (3.1)	10.6 (3.2)

Source: Jones et al. 2008.

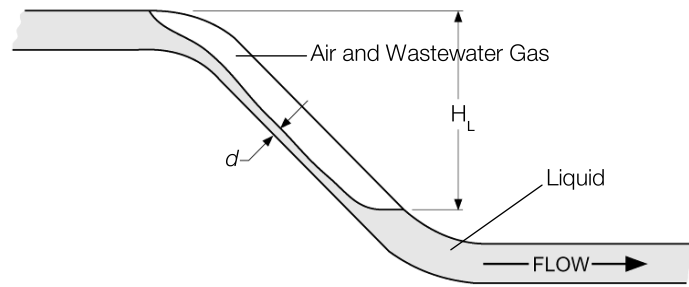


Figure 1-1 Air and wastewater gas pocket in a pipeline

SOURCES OF AIR AND WASTEWATER GASES IN LIQUID PIPING SYSTEMS

In addition to air and wastewater gases coming out of solution, air may enter liquid piping systems at leaky joints where the pressure within the liquid piping system falls below atmospheric pressure. These conditions exist in the vortex at the pump suction, at pump glands where negative pressure occurs, and at all locations where the pipe elevation is above the hydraulic grade line.

Air may enter liquid piping systems through air/vacuum and combination air valves following complete pump shutdown, through the orifices of air-release valves installed in locations where the pressure is less than atmospheric, and through pump suction pipes or inlet structures that are not properly designed to prevent vortexing. Finally, most vertical turbine and well pumps start with air and wastewater gases in the pump column as shown in Figure 1-2, which may pass by the check valve and flow into the liquid piping system with every pump start.

Air and wastewater gases entrainment is much greater in wastewater force main systems than in other pumped liquid transmission systems owing to their unique design and operational characteristics. Lift stations with wet wells or other sewage collection basins are a major source of entrained air and wastewater gases induced by plunging jets of sewage and by vortices of air and wastewater gases sucked into the pump. Because of the cyclic operation of force main systems, sections of the force mains empty out at the end of each pumping cycle, drawing air and wastewater gases into pipes. At the entrance to sewage lift stations, air and wastewater gases are entrained from plunging jets of sewage.

AIR AND WASTEWATER GAS POCKET BEHAVIOR IN PIPELINES

Four major factors influence entrained air and wastewater gas behavior in liquid piping systems: buoyancy, velocity, drag, and equilibrium in surface tension between the liquid, air and wastewater gases, and the pipe wall. These factors, together with air and wastewater gas pocket size and concentration, influence the tendency of bubbles to aggregate and increase in size and determine the direction of their movement either with or opposite to the direction of liquid flow. These factors also affect the entrained air and wastewater gases pockets' influence on liquid flow capacity, head loss, and energy consumption. In rising pipe sections and when there is no flow in the pipeline, buoyancy will force air and wastewater gas pockets of all sizes and shapes to travel to peaks or high points along the liquid pipeline. At downsloping and level pipe sections, when buoyancy exceeds drag, the pockets will travel upward in the opposite direction to the flow. When drag exceeds buoyancy, the pockets will travel in the direction of liquid flow. Large air and wastewater gas pockets traveling in opposite direction to the liquid flow often break up in flow

due to buoyancy, resulting in smaller air and wastewater gas pockets, including bubbles, changing direction and being dragged in the direction of the liquid flow with the larger air and wastewater gas pockets or continuing to travel upstream against the flow. Pockets of air and wastewater gases traveling with the liquid stream also break up into smaller air and wastewater gas pockets and bubbles that disperse in the liquid stream, traveling in different velocities. In all these cases, the air and wastewater gas pocket's movement disturbs the flow where drag and turbulence increase head losses, resulting in decreased flow capacity and increased energy consumption (Lubbers and Clemens 2005).



Figure 1-2 An air valve installed on the outlet of a pump and upstream of the check valve

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Chapter 2

Types of Air Valves

This chapter discusses the three basic types of air valves used in the water and wastewater industry that are included in ANSI/AWWA C512, latest edition, Air Valves: Air-Release, Air/Vacuum and Combination for Water and Wastewater Service. Water includes raw water, potable water, and reclaimed wastewater that has been treated. Wastewater is a combination of the used liquid and liquid-carried waste from residences, commercial buildings, industrial plants, and institutions, together with any groundwater infiltration, surface water, and stormwater that may enter the collection system. Air valves for wastewater service meet special design requirements, which may include enlarged inlet connections of at least 2 in. (50 mm), elongated bodies with sloped bottoms, bronze or stainless-steel trim, and interior coatings (ANSI/AWWA C512).

AIR-RELEASE VALVES

Air-release valves, also called *small-orifice valves*, are hydromechanical devices designed to automatically vent small pockets of accumulated air and wastewater gases as they accumulate within a full and pressurized liquid piping system. It is important to note that the term *air-release valve* is sometimes used as a generic term for *air valve* but in this document and in ANSI/AWWA C512, the term *air-release valve* relates to only the small-orifice-type valve. Examples of air-release valve mechanisms are shown in Figure 2-1. Air-release valves are characterized by outlet orifices that are much smaller than the inlet connection or connecting pipe size. Orifice sizes generally fall between an area equivalent to a circle with a diameter of $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (1.6 mm) and 1 in. (25 mm), while the inlet connections can range from $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (13 mm) to 6 in. (150 mm) in diameter. The wastewater version features an elongated body to prevent solids from collecting in the lever mechanism. Flush and drain ports are also provided to assist in cleaning or backwashing the valve.

When installed, the valve is normally open and will vent air and wastewater gases through the orifice. As liquid enters the valve, the float rises, closing the orifice. When air and wastewater gases, which have accumulated in the liquid piping system, enter the

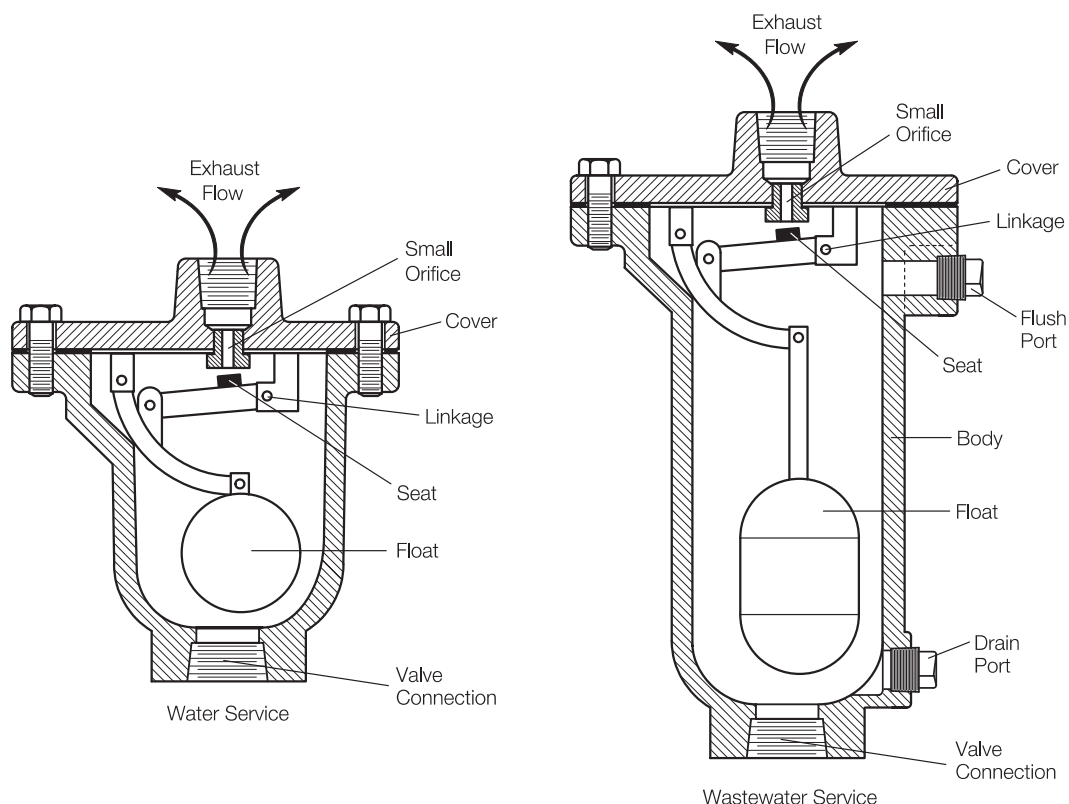


Figure 2-1 Air-release valves

valve, they displace the liquid, causing the float to drop and allowing the air and wastewater gases to vent through the orifice. An air-release valve designed with the proper float weight and proper sealing mechanism design, such as rolling seals or leverage mechanism, will allow the valve to open at any pressure up to the maximum operating pressure of the valve as designated by the manufacturer.

AIR/VACUUM VALVES

Air/vacuum valves, also called *large-orifice valves*, are direct-acting float-operated or diaphragm-operated hydromechanical devices designed to automatically vent or admit large volumes of air and wastewater gases during the filling or draining of a liquid piping system. This valve will open to relieve negative pressures and when closed will not reopen to vent air and wastewater gases when the piping system is full and operating at a pressure exceeding atmospheric pressure. The negative pressure may be due to column separation, system draining, controlled and uncontrolled pump shutdown, check valve or isolating valve closure, or a break in the liquid piping system and so on. Examples of air/vacuum valves are shown in Figure 2-2. The “inlet” of the valve is connected to the liquid piping system. The “outlet” may or may not be equipped with a hood or exhaust piping and is used for the inward flow of air and the outward flow of air and wastewater gases. The wastewater version features an elongated body to prevent solids from collecting in the large orifice with flush and drain ports to assist in cleaning or backwashing the valve.

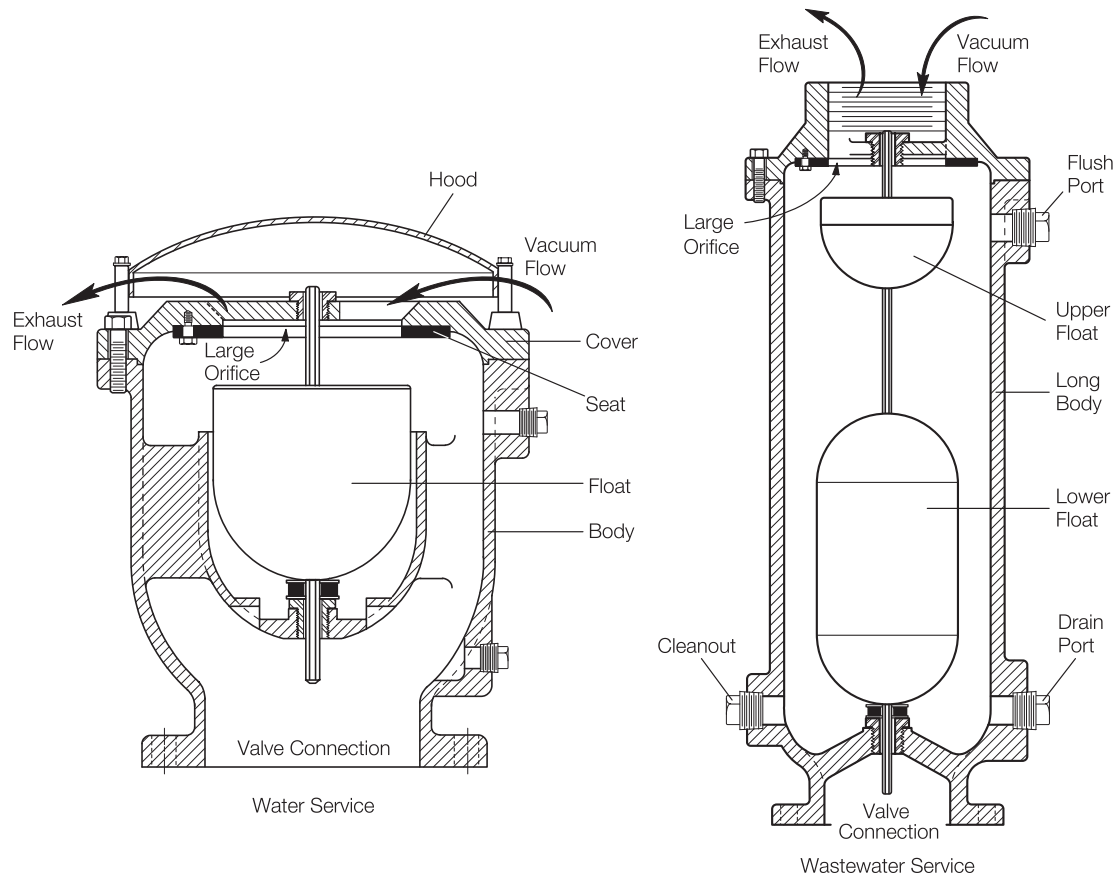


Figure 2-2 Air/vacuum valves

Air/vacuum valves covered by ANSI/AWWA C512 are characterized by orifices having an area equivalent to a circle with a diameter between 1 in. (13 mm) and 20 in. (500 mm) with equal or larger inlet connections. A vacuum breaker is a type of air/vacuum valve that only allows inflow as illustrated in Figure 4-3. As a liquid piping system fills with liquid, the air and wastewater gases in the liquid piping system must be expelled smoothly and uniformly to minimize pressure surges. Likewise, after a pump shutdown or as a liquid piping system drains, air must be admitted to the liquid piping system to prevent the formation of a vacuum that may collapse thin-walled pipes or to prevent the creation of transient pressures as the vapor cavity collapses. At locations of liquid column separation, allowing air to enter the liquid piping system quickly and at sufficient quantities through efficient and properly sized air/vacuum valves or vacuum breakers will help prevent hazardous vapor cavities that may upon collapse cause extreme upsurges or pressure transients.

The operation of an air/vacuum valve is similar to the float operation of the air-release valve except that the orifice diameter is considerably larger and will not open under pressure. An air/vacuum valve is normally open and designed to vent large quantities of air through the orifice. In a float-operated air/vacuum valve, as liquid enters the valve during filling of the system, the float will rise, closing the orifice. Air/vacuum valves once closed WILL NOT REOPEN TO VENT AIR AND WASTEWATER GASES while the liquid piping system is operating under pressure exceeding atmospheric pressure.

COMBINATION AIR VALVES

Combination air valves are designed to perform the same function as air/vacuum valves but, in addition, they will perform the same function as air-release valves and automatically release small pockets of air and wastewater gases from the liquid piping system where the system pressure is greater than atmospheric. Combination air valves can be supplied in a single-body configuration as shown in Figure 2-3 or in a dual-body configuration as shown in Figures 2-4 and 2-5.

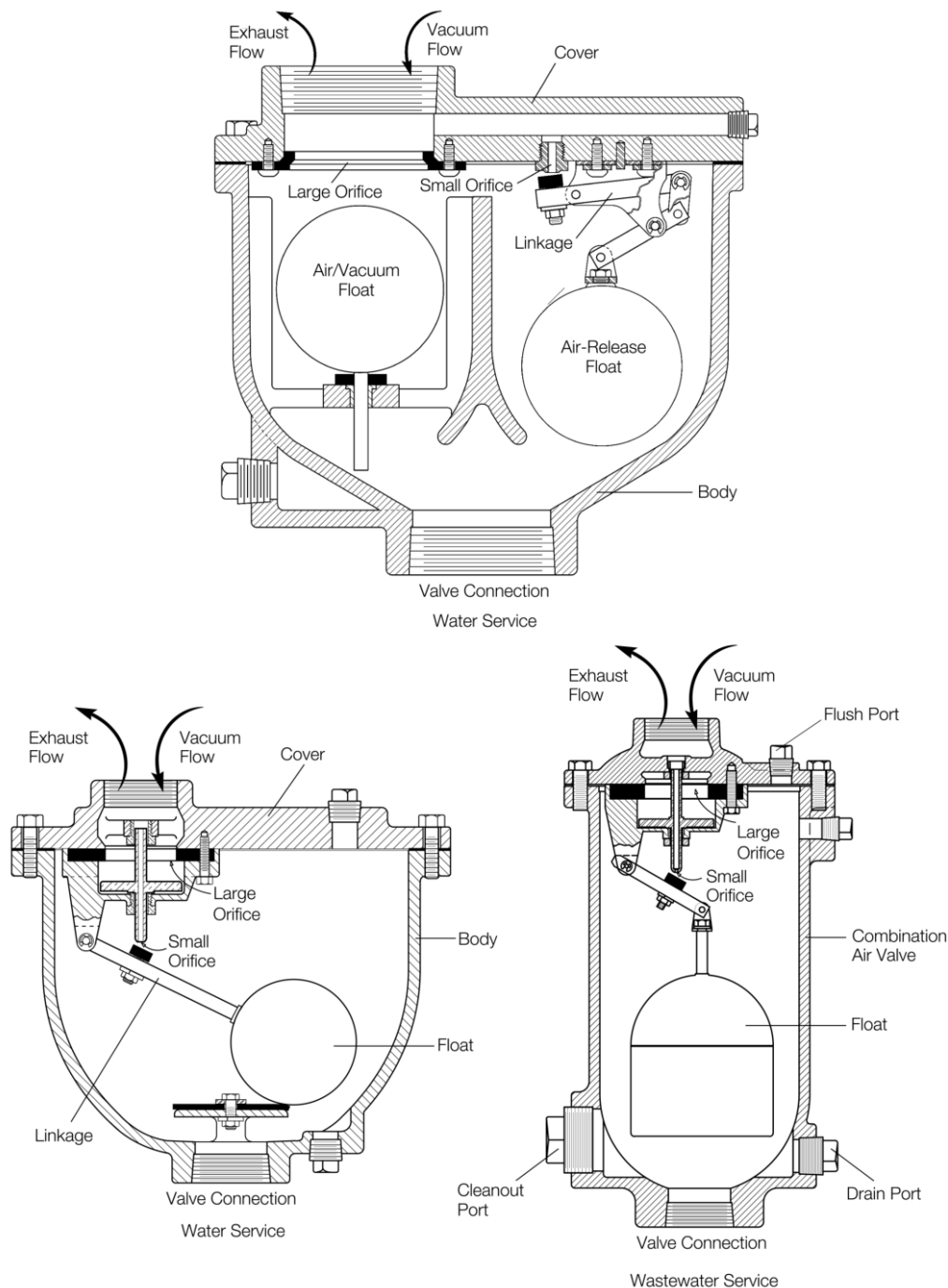


Figure 2-3 Single-body combination air valves

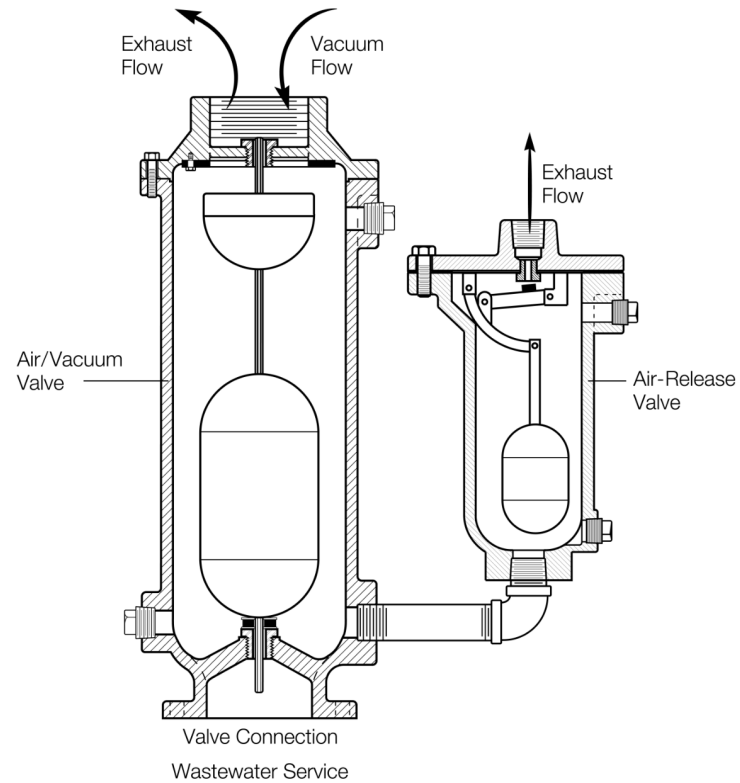


Figure 2-4 Dual-body combination air valves

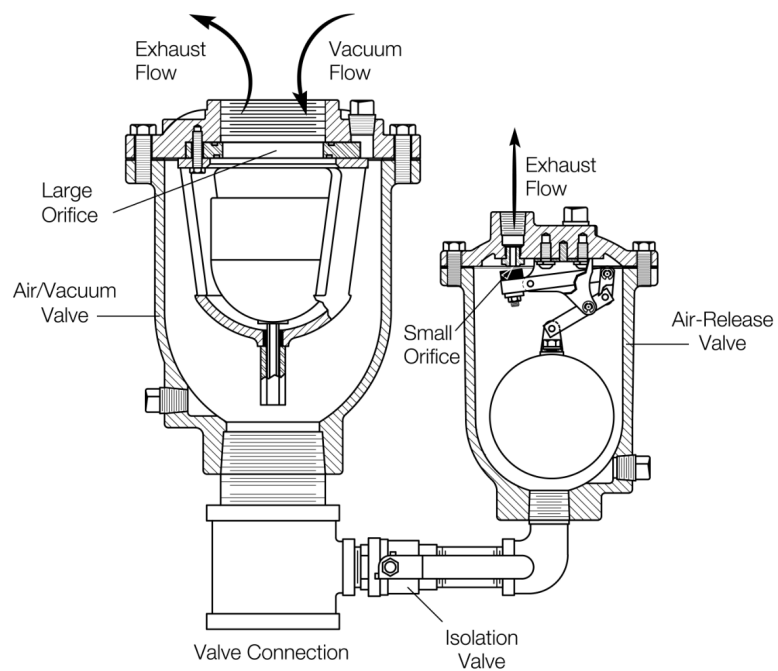


Figure 2-5 Dual-body combination air valve (3 in. [80 mm] and smaller) for water service, bottom-mounted

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