Winter 2015/2016

Water Main Breaks 101

This time of year, water main breaks can be a common occurrence. Changing temperatures cause water mains to expand and contract, putting stress on vulnerable areas. We’re fortunate that much of our system is newer than the national average, but our repair crews are still very busy during the winter months.

If you’ve ever passed one of our trucks and wondered what the crew was doing, now the answer could be right at your fingertips. With a few clicks, you can find real-time updates on active water main breaks. Visit our website at www.fairfaxwater.org and click on the large icon that links to the new Water Main Break Webpage. You can also use www.fwnotifications.org/public to reach the same page.

The page provides a map with the locations of all active water main breaks, details about each break, and real-time repair status updates. You can also report a water main break on the page and find answers to your questions about main breaks.

Although winter weather is often the cause of breaks this time of year, there are a number of reasons water mains break. As mentioned, the age of the pipe often affects its vulnerability to breaks. Changes in water pressure within the pipes, vibrations caused by construction or heavy traffic, or changes in soil conditions caused by erosion or flooding can all lead to water main breaks.

Got Milky Water?

During the time of year when water coming into the house is colder than the temperature inside the house, your tap water may look cloudy. Cold water holds more air than warm water does. Consequently when cold water from the water mains outside comes inside our heated homes and the water begins to warm, the air must escape. It does so by bubbling out in tiny air bubbles, making the water look milky.

To determine if this is why your water looks milky or opaque, run water into a clear container and watch the container for a few minutes. If the water clears from the bottom to the top of the container, as you see in these photos, then the phenomenon described is occurring. The air bubbles are moving from the bottom to the top of the container to escape into the open atmosphere.
We often talk about being prepared for winter weather, but in our area severe weather can happen at any time. At Fairfax Water we never stop preparing for emergencies. Although we can’t guarantee that our system won’t be affected by inclement weather, we do everything we can to minimize the possibility. Because we monitor the water system 24/7, we always have staff on site and ready to respond to an emergency. But we can’t do it alone. We need your help to prepare your family for emergencies. Taking the steps outlined here could save your life - and theirs!

**Get a kit. Basic emergency supplies include:**
- Three days’ food that doesn’t need refrigeration or electricity to prepare it.
- Three days’ water (a gallon per person and per pet per day).
- A battery-powered and/or hand-crank radio with extra batteries.
- For businesses and offices, water, food bars, and a battery-powered radio or TV to hear local information about whether or not it is safe to travel.
- A power pack for recharging cell phones and other mobile devices.

**Make a plan. Everyone needs an emergency plan:**
- Decide who your out-of-town emergency contact will be.
- Where will you meet up with family members if you can’t return home?

**Stay informed. Before, during, and after a winter storm, be sure to:**
- Listen to local media for information and instructions from emergency officials.
- Be aware of winter storm watches and warnings and road conditions.
- Get where you need to go before the weather gets bad.
- Get road condition information 24/7 by calling 511 or checking [www.511Virginia.org](http://www.511Virginia.org).

**Just a click away**

Download the free Ready Virginia app at [www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia](http://www.vaemergency.gov/readyvirginia). Get location-specific weather watches and warnings, disaster news from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), a customizable family emergency plan, a checklist of emergency supplies, and links to register for local emergency alerts.

Download the free Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) app at [www.fema.gov/mobile-app](http://www.fema.gov/mobile-app) for information about what to do before, during and after a disaster, including locations and driving directions to open shelters and disaster recovery centers.

Visit [www.ReadyNOVA.org](http://www.ReadyNOVA.org) and complete your family preparedness plan. For business owners, [www.ReadyNOVA.org](http://www.ReadyNOVA.org) has a business preparedness planner so you can plan to stay in business during the next disaster.

Sign up for local emergency alerts at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/alerts). You decide the type of alerts you want on any or all of your electronic devices.

Visit [www.ready.gov/car](http://www.ready.gov/car) to learn more about preparing your car for emergencies.

**WATER IS LIFE**

In an emergency, having a supply of clean water is a top priority. Even though Fairfax Water has more than one water treatment plant to provide back up in emergencies, you could still temporarily lose access to clean water. Take steps now to store emergency water supplies - here are some helpful tips:

* Store at least one gallon of water per person per day for a minimum three-day supply. This means a family of four needs 12 gallons.
* Be sure to account for pets; dogs and cats typically need one gallon each per day.
* Store water in a cool, dark place in your home, office, or car. Replace water every six months and be sure to check expiration dates on store-bought water.
* Use of food-grade water storage containers, such as those found at surplus or camping-supply stores, is recommended if you prepare stored water yourself.
* If you use your own containers for storing water, make sure to sanitize them first. To sanitize, wash containers with dishwashing soap and rinse with water. Sanitize by swishing a solution of one teaspoon of liquid household chlorine bleach to a quart of water on all interior surfaces of the container. Rinse thoroughly with clean water before use.
* Do not reuse containers that have ever held a toxic substance; containers that can break, like glass; containers without a tight seal; or plastic milk bottles or cartons that can be difficult to clean and can break down over time.

Recently, one of our neighbors had their water meter replaced and it prompted me to ask, “What should a homeowner expect when their water meter is replaced?”

There are typically two reasons why Fairfax Water replaces a meter: 1) the meter is not working properly; or, 2) the meter is old and is scheduled for replacement before it stops working.

Most Fairfax Water meters are located outside in a box or vault. Because we don’t need access to your home, it is not typical for Fairfax Water to make an appointment with the homeowner prior to meter replacement. (If your meter is inside your home, a technician will schedule an appointment with you.) If your meter should require replacement or repair, our technician will arrive at your residence and knock on your door to alert you to their presence. They will be in uniform, have a photo ID, and be in a Fairfax Water vehicle that carries our logo.

If someone is home, the technician will explain what they are doing, how long to expect your water to be off (typically less than 30 minutes), and what to do once the water is back on. If no one is home, the technician will leave a tag on your door explaining the work they did and what you should do to clear any air that may have gotten in the water line during the repair.

Once the meter is repaired or replaced, you can clear any air from the line by removing the aerator from the faucet farthest from the main water line valve that enters your home and running the water for a few minutes. The water may sputter for a couple of minutes. Once the sputtering stops, replace the aerator. This completes the process.

One last note - it is important to remember that Fairfax Water requires access to your meter box at all times. We understand that some homeowners like to “spruce up” the area around the meter box from time to time. We ask that you not place any objects or plantings directly on the meter box. Should our access to the meter box be blocked, we will have to remove objects or plantings that obstruct our ability to properly service the meter and meter box. If you have additional questions, call 703-698-5800, TTY 711, or e-mail us at customers@fairfaxwater.org.

If you have a question or concern, contact us at pr@fairfaxwater.org or call 703-698-5600, TTY 711.
We Want to Know . . .
If you have comments or suggestions about the newsletter, please send an e-mail to pr@fairfaxwater.org, call us at 703-289-6194, or write to us at this address:

Straight From the Tap Editor
Fairfax Water
8570 Executive Park Avenue
Fairfax, VA 22031

Important Numbers
Fairfax Water Services
Questions about water service
703-698-5800
After hours/emergencies
703-698-5613
To report a water main break
703-698-5613 or e-mail watermainbreak@fairfaxwater.org
Questions about billing
703-698-5800
All other Fairfax Water departments
703-698-5600

Sewer Services
Fairfax County
Department of Public Works
Wastewater Trouble Response Center
703-323-1211
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/wastewater
City of Falls Church
Department of Public Works
703-248-5350
www.fallschurchva.gov
City of Fairfax
Department of Public Works
703-385-7810
www.fairfaxva.gov

Dig with C.A.R.E.
Miss Utility at 1-800-552-7001 or 811, http://va811.com/homeowners/how-to-when-to
Use TTY 711 (Virginia Relay) for all numbers unless otherwise stated.

Kids’ Corner
There are lots of words for water. Can you name each type of water below using these words: waterfall, lake, wave, stream, ocean, pond?

A: waterfall; B: ocean; C: wave; D: lake; E: stream; F: pond

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Thurs., Dec. 24
Fairfax Water offices closed at noon for Christmas Eve

Fri., Dec. 25
Fairfax Water offices closed for Christmas Day

Fri., Jan. 1
Fairfax Water offices closed for New Year’s Day

Mon., Jan. 18
Fairfax Water offices closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Mon., Feb. 15
Fairfax Water offices closed for Washington’s Birthday

Sat., Feb. 20
2016 Eco-Savvy Symposium: Water-Wise Gardening - From Drought to Deluge; Green Spring Garden; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; call 703-642-5173 for more information

Mon., March 21
Hidden Pond Monday: Amphibians; Richard Byrd Library; 4:30 - 5:30 p.m.; visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/rb or call 703-451-8055

Sat., April 16
28th Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup; visit www.potomaccleanup.org or call 202-973-8203

Thurs., Dec. 24
Fairfax Water offices closed at noon for Christmas Eve

Fri., Dec. 25
Fairfax Water offices closed for Christmas Day

Fri., Jan. 1
Fairfax Water offices closed for New Year’s Day

Mon., Jan. 18
Fairfax Water offices closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Mon., Feb. 15
Fairfax Water offices closed for Washington’s Birthday

Sat., Feb. 20
2016 Eco-Savvy Symposium: Water-Wise Gardening - From Drought to Deluge; Green Spring Garden; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; call 703-642-5173 for more information

Mon., March 21
Hidden Pond Monday: Amphibians; Richard Byrd Library; 4:30 - 5:30 p.m.; visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov/library/branches/rb or call 703-451-8055

Sat., April 16
28th Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup; visit www.potomaccleanup.org or call 202-973-8203

Water-Saving Tip

Upgrade to an inexpensive, water-efficient shower head and save up to 750 gallons of water a month. For more tips on saving water, visit www.mwcog.org/environment/water/watersupply/wisewater.asp.