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Broken water main in Vernon flowing again

By Jason Rowe , Journal Inquirer

VERNON - Water service slowly returned to normal throughout the area Monday afternoon and night as crews repaired a broken water main on Windsorville Road, which spilled more than 1 million gallons of water earlier in the day.

Customers in four towns were affected by the break, which was reported shortly after 5:45 a.m. Monday, officials said.

By 8 p.m., the broken pipe was replaced and all affected customers were coming back on line, said Dan Meaney, a spokesman for the Connecticut Water Co. The 16-inch transmission line along the state road, also known as Route 74, is responsible for bringing water from Vernon to Ellington and South Windsor. Meaney said a 15-foot section of the roughly 40-year-old cast-iron pipe cracked horizontally, allowing water to gush out of the system.

Although officials don't have an exact estimate on the amount of water lost, Meaney said it was more than 1 million gallons. Meaney said recent weather conditions likely contributed to the break. "We went from bitterly cold to warm to rain - that causes the ground to shift slightly," said Meaney, who equated the broken pipe to a split piece of firewood. "It's not uncommon that we see a piece of pipe break in that direction."

Police said Monday morning that they had received calls from water customers in Ellington and Tolland complaining about disruptions in their service. But by 4:30 p.m., Meaney said, the affected pipe had been removed and water pressure had begun to return to normal. Meaney said the water company hadn't received any calls from customers today complaining about low water pressure or discolored water.

A section of Windsorville Road between the Ellington line and Franklin Street was closed Monday as crews repaired the broken pipe. After the pipe was repaired, workers rebuilt the roadway, which carries motorists between the Rockville section of town and Ellington. In addition to affecting local residential customers, officials at Rockville General Hospital and several assisted-living facilities had to contend with a loss of water pressure.

Hospital officials brought in a 6,000-gallon water tanker truck to ensure the facility's demand for water would be met, town Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro said Tuesday. Other trucks were put on standby in case they were needed at the hospital, Purcaro said. Because of the risk of low water pressure in the hospital's sprinkler system, fire watch teams were assigned to each floor to watch for fires or other emergencies, officials said. The hospital also housed an emergency coordination center, which was staffed by Purcaro, police Lt. Michael Greenier, and hospital officials.

"When you remove water from a large portion of a town, you run into health issues, you run into fire suppression issues," Purcaro said. "These are real concerns." But in the end, Purcaro said, the town's emergency management plan worked smoothly. Lt. Brian Smith said police didn't receive any reports of injuries or other problems relating to the water main break.

And although a substantial amount of water was lost from the break, Meaney said, the water company's tanks have since refilled and there should be no long-term effects on the company's water supply.



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