

# REMINDER

Newspapers ♦ Yellow Pages

Publication: VERNON; Date: 2006 Jan 03; Section: Front Page; Page Number: 1

## Water main break causes disruption to Vernon, Ellington and South Windsor CT Water customers

By JESSICA CIPARELLI Staff Writer

VERNON — Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink – that’s how residents of three area towns were feeling the day after Christmas when a water main on Windsorville Road in Vernon broke. Low water pressure, no pressure, no water, or brown water greeted residents as they awoke Dec. 26. The water main broke around 5:30 a.m., said Dan Meaney, manager of public affairs for Connecticut Water. “We received an indication from our Wapping Wood [Road] tank that the levels were dropping unusually fast,” he said. A large crack in a 15-foot section of pipe caused a little more than one million gallons of water to spill out onto Windsorville Road. “The best estimate of what happened is the freezing and thawing of the ground,” said Meaney. “That’s probably the most frequent cause of breaks.” There are close to 11,000 Connecticut Water customers in Vernon/Rockville (4,900), Ellington (2,500), and South Windsor (4,700), but not all of them were affected by the breach. “It’s difficult to say, if you count dirty water as affected; it’s hard to say to any degree,”



said Meaney, noting there were varying degrees of people affected – from no water to dirty water. Meaney said there were a handful of customers – 50 to 100 in the Windsorville Road area – that had no water from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Water was shut off at Five Corners in Ellington to Route 83 in Vernon. At 8 a.m., crews from Connecticut Water were in the process of shutting down the water main, and by 9-9:30 a.m, the breach was fully isolated, Meaney said. Calls flooded into Connecticut Water’s toll-free number, as residents awoke and found the — problem. “We did get a lot of calls [Dec. 26] and a lot of people couldn’t get through,” said Meaney. He said once the information was dispersed through the media, the call volume died down. Connecticut Water also dispatched a pre-recorded message to all its customers regarding the break.

Vernon Emergency Management Director Michael Purcaro said he received a call from Vernon Police Department Administrative Lieutenant Michael Greenier early Dec. 26. An anonymous caller had stated that water was gushing out of Windsorville Road. The water company, mayor’s office, fire and public works departments were quickly notified, he said. State officials were also contacted, including the state Departments of Public Health and Homeland Security, the latter Purcaro said, was standard protocol. “All I knew was thousands of water customers lost water pressure,” he said, noting major facilities, such as Rockville General Hospital, the dialysis center on Route 30 and senior congregate housing were affected. “You have to have the state involved.” Purcaro and Vernon emergency officials arrived on the scene for a visual assessment around 8:30 a.m. “It was significant – it wasn’t a small leak,” Purcaro said. Purcaro said water pressure fluctuated at

Rockville General Hospital. “[There was] minimal to no water pressure at the hospital,” he said. Water trucks were brought in for hospital use, and with water pressure down, hospital staff was on fire watch on each floor, with VFD on standby. An emergency coordinating center was staged at RGH, and included hospital representatives, police, local and state public health officials, and officials from the state Department of Homeland Security. “It was an intense day, but it really highlighted the importance of public and private partnerships between local and state government working with the private water utility,” Purcaro said. “That can



be a difficult thing, with so many players at the table. For things to have gone as smoothly as they did speaks for the caliber of the people [involved]. Egos were checked at the door and everyone worked in the best interest of the residents we served at all levels.” Vernon Town Administrator Larry Shaffer said while the breach probably could not have been avoided – and he commended the water company’s quick action to alleviate the problem – he would like to know if Connecticut Water has any long-term plans to try to avoid a situation – one Shaffer called serious –

from happening again. “It probably could not have been avoided, given the spongy ground,” said Shaffer. “That Windsorville area is the lowest part of town – it’s not surprising that pipes in the ground are vulnerable to cracking. That’s pretty much swamp land. We’re always interested in finding out how Connecticut Water deals with the immediate problem and long-term [problems].”

In Ellington, First Selectman Michael Stupinski said that Don Davis, Ellington’s Emergency Management Director, stayed in close contact with Vernon’s Purcaro. Stupinski said he drove down to the scene and found that it was barricaded, but when he saw the images on television, he was impressed. “I think Connecticut Water was very responsive,” he said. “I know it’s not fun to have water out that long, but I think it was well-handled by Connecticut Water.” Stupinski said there was only one message left on the town hall answering machine regarding the issue. In South Windsor, officials said they heard from several residents and referred them to Vernon Police Department for further information. “We referred them to Vernon because they had more information than we had,” said South Windsor Police Chief Gary Tyler. “When the water company came out with an 800 number, we kept it in dispatch to relay to our citizens,” he said. “Water was back online around 8 p.m. on Monday,” said Bob Deptula, environmental health officer for South Windsor. “[Affected residents in South Windsor] either had low pressure or dirty water or a combination of both.” Deptula said he was in contact with Tom Mongillo, the regional manager in Connecticut Water’s East Windsor office, and was told that a chlorine residual was maintained in the water at all times to kill any bacteria that may have been in the water. On Tuesday, Dec. 27 at 4:30 p.m., Meaney said that water samples that were taken from the area impacted by the breach confirmed no bacteria present.

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