

News



BOIL WATER MAP 2-16-21

City Council water update from Water Utilities Director

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*For residents who have had their water turned off due to water leaks at their home: If you need non-potable water for flushing the toilets, please call 325-486-3776 and leave a message with your name, phone number and address. City staff will be in contact with you about getting water for your toilets.

The City warming shelters at the McNease Convention Center and Fort Concho Stables have closed. All residents who were using them have now returned home or found other accommodations.

Update to City Council from Water Utilities Director Allison Strube

Since the last press conference held Friday, Feb. 12, the utility has been through catastrophic impacts to our operation. While it provides me very little comfort or ease through this process, we are not alone in facing water issues. It has been stated that over 12 million Texans are facing supply and/or boil water notice issues due to the weather and electrical issues this past week.

As we provided updates to the PaulAnn area issues, we ended last week with massive amounts of water being flushed from the system specifically in that area. Our crews began executing a flushing plan late last Wednesday, Feb. 10. This crew worked around the clock flushing over 90 hydrants in the affected area. This flushing ended around 4 a.m. Saturday morning. That same Saturday morning we began taking samples throughout the PaulAnn do-not-consume area. With the weather deteriorating as it did, we were unable to get the samples to the lab until after we had to issue a citywide boil water notice due to pressure loss in the entire system. Sample results were received this past Wednesday and forwarded on to TCEQ. All samples were clean but at the time of receiving those results, our system was not pressurized enough or stable enough to discuss the restriction lifting with TCEQ. The City has requested a discussion with TCEQ later today to further reduce the restrictions for this area. We will provide an update to the public soon after those discussions occur.

When it comes to the events that happened with the contaminants in the water of the PaulAnn area, it has been discussed or rumored that this was an intentional or malicious attack on our water supply. We have found no evidence to confirm or support that. These chemicals are common in a multitude of commercial industries from car/truck repair to agricultural businesses. All of these type of industries are present in the do-not-use restriction area. Late last week, we had the assistance of McAllen city employees performing customer service inspections on these facilities. Unfortunately, due to the storm they had to go back to McAllen before the road conditions deteriorated; but while they were here they were able to go to many of these facilities for inspections. The results of those inspections did not provide solid confirmation of the source. With the declaration that the City is extending today, we will be able to continue to receive assistance from customer service inspectors available across the state to continue those inspections that will hopefully result in confirmation of the source of the chemicals.

While we are still taking all steps we can to identify the source of last week's contamination event, we are also taking steps to prevent future events from occurring. These steps include implementing a more rigorous backflow or cross-connection program, continued inspections of customer's facilities to ensure the water system is protected and continuing to ensure backflow assemblies are meeting their annual testing requirements.

We have been asked if there will be criminal charges filed against those responsible for the spill. The City Attorney's office is reviewing all options available – both civilly and criminally. However, future actions taken will be determined by whether we can clearly identify the source.

That brings us to this bitter cold week.

On Tuesday, a citywide boil water notice was issued. This notice was issued due to the loss of pressure and ultimately the loss of water to large portions of our distribution system.

As I discussed, we went into this winter storm event with a massive flushing plan being executed. We were able to maintain deliveries the first few days despite losing power at our river pumping station and tank pumping stations because we had backup generators to utilize when those systems went down. We did lose the ability to pump water from the Hickory due to the power outages on that system but our river pumps were able to keep up with the demands. Currently, our surface water source is the Concho River as supplied by Lake Nasworthy and Twin Buttes. The O.H. Ivie system has been down since mid-October while Colorado River Municipal Water District recoats the distribution system tanks that feed water to their customers.

On Tuesday, the battles we were facing were many, including freezing lines that wouldn't allow for pumps to start, pump control cabinets at the pumping stations that were completely frozen, frozen fill valve and ultimately the last straw to affect the system were the leaks that have been numerous as the freezing weather continued to stay.

We have been working continuously to reestablish the pressures in our system ever since the loss. It has been a very slow process but we are making slight improvements each day. On Wednesday, plant pressures were around 40 to 50 psi, when it is normal to be in the 80 to 90 psi range. On Thursday, that improved to 70 to 80 psi and we even started to see some volume make it to the LakeView and Loop tank storage facilities. Last night, we were able to see those tank levels increase and even started to be able to bleed water pressure into parts of the high plane.

For reference, these are the water tanks we have in town:

Southwest = 9.4 million gallons

Abilene = 3.5 million gallons

Loop Elevated Tank = 1 million gallons

Lakeview Elevated Tank = 1.25 million gallons

Bluffs Elevated Tank = 2 million gallons

Our flow rate of deliveries yesterday was approximately 21.5 MGD. This is typically a flow that we see in the peak summer heat.

We have seen a lot of questions asking why the City can't simply shut water off to the low plane to refill the tanks in the high plane. In theory, that would be a great idea but in reality it is not feasible with our system. The water treatment plant supplies pressure to the majority of the low plane. Although water does leave the treatment plant through large mains that feed to the tanks, there are many feeds off those bigger lines that feed the low plane. The low plane must be full and pressurized before the water can make it to the tanks that feed into the high plane. The tanks and additional pumping systems then feed the pressure to the high plane.

We are asking, and at this point I personally am begging, customers to conserve and be responsible water users. Use it for life-sustaining purposes only, which include flushing of toilets and boiling water for consumption. The less demand we have on the system, the more water can be dedicated to filling tanks, citywide repressurizing and ultimately rescinding the boil water notice. It will take everyone's assistance to get through this.

I want to also make sure everyone is aware that we are not just asking this of customers in the low plane or asking this only right now. As we are able to send more water into the high plane, we are going to ask them to do the exact same thing. It will take large amounts of water to completely fill our high plane distribution lines and regain pressure in those areas, and we will be right back to trying to refill tanks as we are now. Until pressure is regained citywide and tanks are returned, we will be asking for this conservative use of water.

The boil water notice will be in effect until we can get tanks filled, the system repressurized and then sampling can begin. As we have experienced before, these samples take at least 18 hours to run. We will be collecting a large number of due to the massive dewatering of the system, so it will take time to rescind.

I also think it is important to set the expectation and to warn citizens that as the temperatures increase and we begin to thaw out, we will see more water main breaks and likely additional leaks on the customer side.

These past couple of weeks have been painstakingly hard. I want to thank our customers for working through these difficult events with us and I know we will get through this.

Thank you also to our crews that have worked so hard through miserable conditions to get us through this. I work with the most dedicated group of men and women. Their passion and drive are nothing short of inspiring and when I receive a picture of one of our crew members fixing a water main break in sub-zero degrees soaked and covered in mud but with the biggest smile on their face, I know I work with the best of the best.

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