



On the Water Front

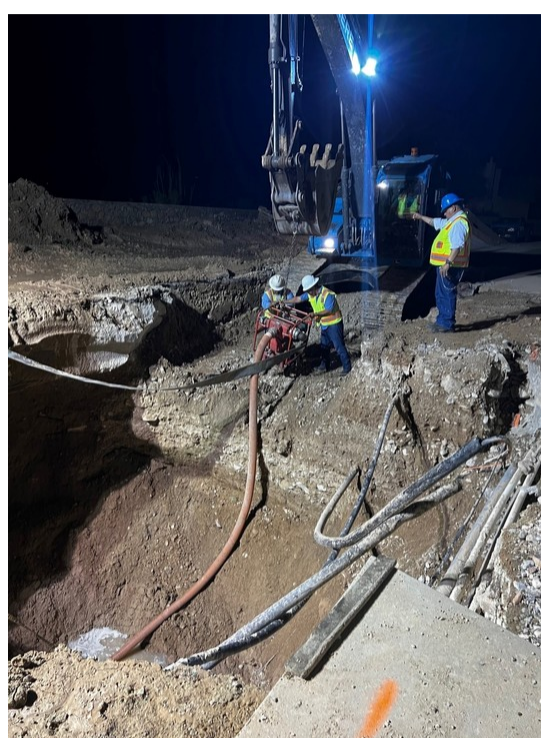
July 2022 | A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO

Main breaks, like Ojo de Agua, take collaboration

When you have a water system that spans thousands of miles across varied terrain, main breaks will happen. They are inconvenient, unpredictable and, unfortunately, part of normal operations for a water utility.

According to a recent national study from the Water Research Foundation, the average pipe break rate for water utilities is between 21 to 27 breaks per 100 miles of pipeline per year. EPWater averages about 5 breaks per 100 miles. The reasons for main breaks vary – weather temperature changes, age of the pipe, water pressure, etc. But when they occur, El Paso Water’s main priority becomes to restore water service as safely as possible.

When events such as the recent Ojo de Agua main break unfolded in west El Paso, EPWater’s dedicated professionals stepped up, working to isolate the pipe, shutting off valves and taking water supply out of service until repairs were completed.



Crews work around the clock to repair the main break at Ojo de Agua.

All hands on deck

To get water flowing through the West Side neighborhood’s pipes, about 50 EPWater employees worked tirelessly over two days in 100-degree weather – including Water Distribution crews and Heavy Equipment Operators who worked overnight – to restore service. Contractor crews were also called in to assist with construction duties.

Before repairs begin, we rely on other utilities to identify their lines underground and sometimes additional equipment must be delivered from the other side of town. While waiting last week at Ojo de Agua, crew members busied themselves with other jobs, such as loading temporary water supplies in residents’ vehicles. We appreciated our customers keeping an eye out for their elderly neighbors as well. Other employees worked nearby to locate a temporary bypass line to get water to as many residents as possible.

EPWater can count on each employee to be laser-focused and go above and beyond the call of duty – such as our superintendent who left only for a short rest across town to refresh, our Chief Operations Officer who stayed overnight to oversee major repairs, our Public Affairs Officer who worked long hours to constantly update the public on social media, our Assistant Chief Financial Officer who trekked across the city to find and replenish temporary water supplies for residents and our Mechanical Engineering Associate whose expertise in Water Production was instrumental to repairs. And the list goes on of employees who exceed expectations. None of us wants to let our customers down.

Key infrastructure is underground

Unfortunately, water main repairs are never immediate because crews never know how severe the break is until they locate the source of interruption, in this case 20 feet underground. Our key infrastructure is underground, and that’s why offering an estimated time to completion can be tricky.



Crew members make repairs at Ojo de Agua.

We understand our customers’ frustrations when repairs don’t go swiftly, but please trust that our employees are working to minimize the impact to our customers as well as property damage to the affected area. Nothing feels better than restoring water service to affected customers, but there are also guidelines that must be followed from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality on water quality to ensure public safety as well.

Emergency repair projects are also complicated because an extraordinary amount of coordination with other entities is necessary before the job is truly complete. Streets must be repaved after being filled in, and permits must be secured before that work can start.

I’m pleased to note that the response from affected residents was overwhelmingly positive. We heard from so many, thanking us in many ways for our diligence and for checking in with neighbors after water service was restored. To the residents who thanked our work crews with freshly baked cookies or on social media, our crews are deeply grateful. Most of all, we value your patience and understanding when emergency repairs are necessary.

We see learning opportunities in all our projects. EPWater employees are already discussing solutions to some of the challenges we came across during the Ojo de Agua main break. We are always open and on the lookout for new and more efficient solutions to our work practices.

If at some point you spot EPWater employees in your neighborhood working to repair a main break, please bear with us. Our professionals on the frontlines are working hard to safely restore your service.

Our customers can trust that EPWater wants to ensure that our water and wastewater systems deliver the highest quality water and services reliably for generations to come.



On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water. Contact Christina Montoya at 915.594.5596 or cmontoya@epwater.org with any comments or questions.

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