

Water Main Breaks

What Are Water Mains?

Water mains are pipes that carry drinking water to homes and businesses. Livingston's water mains range from 12 inches to 6 inches in diameter.

Did You Know?

The great majority of Livingston's water comes from our own wells. Only a small section of the Township receives water from NJ American Water. However, when demand is high, we end up using more water overall, which we must get from NJ American. It all feeds into our approximately 160 miles of water mains, which are aided by 3 booster stations.

Water Main Breaks

As more than 60 percent of Livingston's water mains are 50 years or older, breaks in the pipes are both unavoidable and unpredictable. Each break brings its own set of challenges. Small breaks are easier to fix, but can be harder to find. Large breaks can wreak havoc on traffic and sometimes cause damaging floods and water shortages.

What causes breaks?

In addition to age, other factors in water main breaks include:

- Installation configuration
- Previous repairs
- Variations in water pressure
- Corrosion
- Seasonal temperature changes

How do we know when a pipe breaks?

We regularly monitor water pressure at various points in the system — a drop in pressure can signal a problem. But often, the Water Department staff learns about a break when a resident

- (1) **Submits a Service Request** through the Township's website,
- (2) Calls the regular Water Department phone number (973-535-7951), 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., or
- (3) Calls the main number at the Police Department (973-992-3000) after hours to report water running in an unusual location. Then a crew is sent to investigate.

If crews find no obvious source for the running water, they run tests to help determine whether it's drinking or groundwater. If it's drinking water, but no break is visible, the crew uses leak-detection equipment to "listen" for and locate the break.

How do you fix a leak?

Once crew members find a leak, they close the valves on the pipe to stop the flow of water to the broken section. This might cause a temporary service disruption to some properties. After isolating the broken section, the crew repairs or replaces it, depending on the type and severity of the break.

In most cases, repairs are made within several hours to a day after the first report. However, repairs on major water transmission mains may require complex repairs that take longer to complete.



Members of Livingston's Water Department replacing the Water Main on Kearny Terrace.

Weather and Water Mains

Cold weather and freezing temperatures create stress on our water and sewer infrastructure, increasing the chance of leaks. With approximately 160 miles of water mains and 137 miles of sanitary sewer pipes to monitor, residents play a crucial role in reporting breaks.

Reporting a Problem

- During regular business hours (8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.): call 973-535-7951.
- After 4:30 p.m.: call the main number for the Police Department, 973-992-3000.
- Any time, 24/7: **Submit a Service Request** through the Township's website.

Once the Water Department has been notified, an experienced employee or a crew goes to the location reported to investigate and assess the problem.

Main breaks that leave customers without water service are given highest priority for repair. When a break is identified, the water is turned off to the immediate area and repairs begin. Though crews work quickly, work can take eight hours or more.

The emergency has been reported. Now what?

When we receive a call or Service Request about a leak or break, we take several steps.

- Getting the information. When you call, you'll be asked some questions to collect information about the location and severity of the situation so our staff can respond effectively.
- Evaluation. When a crew arrives on-site, they'll determine if it's necessary to shut down the water main. In many cases, the main break itself may already have interrupted water service or reduced water pressure for customers.
- We'll inform affected residents as soon as possible of a water main break. However, when there are unsafe conditions or property damage, we may have to perform an emergency shutdown, giving us little opportunity to provide advance notice. Sometimes, the presence of a crew in the area and low or changing water pressure are the only initial notices you may have of a water main break.
- If critical businesses or organizations — such as restaurants, office buildings, schools and hospitals — are affected by a main break, Water Department staff members will work to accommodate them with temporary services as feasible.

Repairing the Main

When a water main break is confirmed, a crew will set up a work zone and detour traffic. The crew will also turn off the main (immediately, if needed) and work to mark the various utilities near the break as required by law. After the utilities have been marked, the crew will excavate and secure a trench and begin repairs. Crews work continuously to repair breaks and restore water service; however, unforeseen challenges can arise causing the process to take longer, including:

- Older malfunctioning valves
- Delays marking utilities or mismarked utilities
- Working around other utilities (gas, telephone, power or fiber optics)
- Weather conditions
- Equipment problems
- Safety of repair crews

Notifying Residents

Notifying residents in the immediate area of the problem is, of course, a primary concern. Sometimes customers will be notified directly via fliers. Information on water main repairs is typically shared via Facebook and the Township's website. Other times we'll utilize the Township's [Swift911](#) system to provide notification about an emergency. In the case of a serious, widespread situation, the local media may be notified. Residents may be asked to **conserve water** during the emergency. It's always a good idea to have a few gallons of water stored away in case of emergency.

When Water Service Is Restored

In most cases, when the water pressure returns, you'll need to run the cold water tap for a few minutes to clear the pipes. Use of hot water may draw discolored water into your hot water heater, prolonging a potential disruption. If, after five minutes, you still notice discoloration or a strange odor, call us at 973-535-7951. We will come back to flush the system through fire hydrants and/or at your meter location.

In the rare instance that additional actions are needed, residents will be informed directly through one of the communication channels mentioned above.

