



Department of Public Works

29 Water Plant Drive, Perryville, MD 21903

Phone: 410-642-6068

Hours of operation Monday – Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Guide for Water Main Breaks & Brown Water: What Should You Know

Why is My Water Brown?

Minerals, sediment, or rust can accumulate in water mains over time. When the water from your tap is brown, this indicates a disturbance in the water main or the pipes in your home that stirs up these deposits. There are a number of reasons why this can occur.

Main breaks and adjacent construction can also stir up these sediments and cause the water to change color. Other causes include a surge in water flow through the pipes due to increased demands and even if the local fire department has opened a hydrant to get water for an emergency. Again, in both cases, the increase in water flow dislodges mineral deposits that have adhered to the interior of the pipes over time.

The most common reason for residential brown water is oxidized iron, or rust, dislodged from the repair of leaky pipes or replacement of water pipes adjacent to old rusty pipes. This is because the water pressure in the pipes changes or drops altogether during repairs. When normal water pressure resumes, loose rust tends to get blown out with the water.

The good news is that usually, the water will clear on its own within a few hours.

Water Breaks

If water is spraying out or ponding in the yard or street area during periods of no rain or melting snow, it may be a water break. Please report suspected water main breaks to 410-642-6066 immediately (phones open weekdays 8a.m. – 4:30p.m Monday-Thru Thursday or Friday 8am to 2:30pm). The after-hour emergency number is 443-206-4425.

Why do water line breaks occur?

While water main breaks are often associated with winter weather conditions - when they are more likely - they can occur at any time of the year on both older and newer water lines. Water lines are pressurized and buried nearly 4 feet deep, below the ground freeze line. However, extreme cold and temperature changes may cause ground shifting which can put unusual stress on the lines. Extended cold weather also makes the ground hard, and vehicular traffic driving over the lines can add additional stress. Breaks can also occur as a result of construction activity in an area.

How are the water main break repairs prioritized?

Breaks are repaired on a priority system based on severity of the leak, location and other factors including critical facilities the line may serve. Breaks along very busy roads might need to be completed during weekends and evenings during times with less traffic. Coordination with area businesses that may have an interruption in water service during the repair may also need to occur before the repair can be made.

Once a leak is reported, how long should I expect it to take for a repair crew to return to fix it?

The town's goal is to repair them as soon as possible, using the prioritization process, and many are repaired within hours of the break reported. For safety reasons, other underground utilities must be marked before excavation can begin. This is to avoid hitting, for example, a gas line.

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When the crew arrives, how long does a waterline break repair take?

Once all the underground utilities in the area have been marked and the repair work begins, a routine water line repair usually takes about 4 to 6 hours to complete, but the time can vary depending upon the extent of what needs to be repaired.

Again, waterline repair work may cause discolored water, reduced water pressure or a temporary loss of water. Once service is restored, it may take 2 to 4 hours for cold water to run clear.

Is the water usually turned off during a repair?

Every attempt is made to keep the water service on during the repair, though you may experience reduced water pressure. In some cases, a water outage may be necessary to make the repair. Notification to affected customers may occur via Water Outage signs placed in the neighborhood or through door hangers when possible. Water outage will be reported on the town's website, Facebook page, and Nixle Alert system. Please register for the town's alert system located on the town's website home page.

Are property owners ever responsible for any waterline repairs?

Yes, but that depends on where the break is found to be. Your property should have a round metal lid embossed "Water" and may be painted blue. The town is responsible for maintaining that the water line on the public right-of-way side of it. The owner is responsible for maintenance of the property's water service line from the water metal lid to the building or home.

Once you report a suspected break, a town's DPW crew can determine which side the leak is on and notify you if you are responsible to repair the leak. In that case, the property owner will be given a specified time period in which the leak must be repaired, to avoid continued water loss. A licensed contractor must be used and an inspection must be scheduled with the town.

Is a boil water advisory necessary on every water line break?

In the rare instance a boil water advisory is needed, which is often precautionary, a notice will be provided on the town's website, Facebook page, and Nixle Alert system. When possible, door hangers will be distributed to affected customers.

What about road closures during a repair?

Yes, road closures may be necessary and can be found on the town's website, Facebook page, and Nixle Alert system.

What is the Town of Perryville doing to reduce water main breaks?

A capital improvement program addresses replacement and rehabilitation need on lines with a higher break history. The Department of Public Works track water line breaks and replace them according. Modern construction methods and materials should help reduce the incidence of future breaks. The DPW always replace broken lines with higher quality material. However, there is no way to completely prevent the occurrence of waterline breaks, and even newer water lines can break.

I live outside Perryville who is responsible for repairing those water lines?

This depends upon the contractual arrangement. If outside the town limit, it is best to report the suspected break and crews can advise on the particular situation.

What else do I need to know?

Waterline repair work may temporarily cause discolored water. Once service is restored, it may take 2 to 4 hours for cold water to run clear and it's best to avoid using hot water or washing clothes. Any roadway pavement disturbed during the work will be repaired as weather permits, which is the same case for lawn restoration (like grass seeding), meaning crews often have to return to a work site in the spring.

For additional questions, please call Aaron Ashford, Public Works Department Superintendent weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 410-642-6068.