

FOCUS ON

DWR's Preventive Maintenance Team: taking the right steps to keep water flowing

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Water Resources Preventive Maintenance team uses break history to determine if repairs and replacements are needed.

With assets worth more than \$6 billion, Gwinnett County's Department of Water Resources has a huge responsibility to keep its water, wastewater, and stormwater systems operating at peak efficiency. That's why preventive maintenance is essential.

For decades, the main challenge has been building systems to keep up with rapid population growth. But now that our community of 840,000 residents is growing at a slower rate, DWR's focus has shifted from having to react quickly to emergency breaks and make necessary repairs to performing preventive

maintenance based on the knowledge of which components are likely to break and need to be replaced before they get to that point.

Instead of the old saying "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," the new model is "it ain't broke yet but it probably will, so let's fix it now and avoid a crisis later." This approach sure beats getting a frantic call in the middle of the night about a broken water main flooding a neighborhood. Or even worse – a broken sewer line.

DWR Field Operations Director Jeff Boss points to one example happening right now in the Hanarry Estates subdivision near Lilburn where the County is replacing four miles of break-prone water mains at a cost of \$1.7 million.

"We use break history to help prioritize what water mains to replace in our Capital Improvement Program and this subdivision is at the top of the list," said Boss. "We track information like age and type of pipe, frequency of repairs, and disruptions to customers to help get the greatest return on investment."



Crews make replacements and repairs throughout the county to prevent large-scale water main and sewer line breaks.

Tracking the right information is the key to preventive maintenance. That means knowing a lot about the assets and their current condition.

To gather and assess the data, DWR is restructuring its organization, putting the right people with the right knowledge in the right place at the right time.



In 2003, only 12 percent of DWR's capital improvements budget was designated for rehabbing and repairing assets. In 2014, that number will reach 91 percent. In the years ahead, we can expect to see fewer people fixing things after they break and more people dedicated to fixing things before they do. The end result will be reduced overall maintenance costs, extended life of the assets, and better service to our customers.

In 2014, Water Resources expects to allocate 91 percent of its capital improvements budget to rehabilitate and repair assets.