As winter approaches, it’s important to remember that freezing temperatures can put the water pipes in your home at risk.

- Jeff Castro, YCUA Director

Annual Fire Hydrant Inspections

This time each year, YCUA winterizes the over 3,000 fire hydrants in its system and checks their operation for fire protection. The procedure involves an employee completing an inspection of the internal workings of each fire hydrant, making repairs, and removing water from the hydrant barrels to prevent freezing. YCUA will also flush or run each fire hydrant to indicate that it will operate properly during an emergency. As part of this process, each fire hydrant is tagged with a ribbon to indicate that the winterization has been completed. The color of the ribbon changes each year and, this year, the color green was selected.

The rust coloring is caused by a natural buildup of minerals in the water system. The fire hydrant inspection program helps insure that all of our fire hydrants are ready in the event of an emergency. If you have any questions about the program, please contact YCUA Director of Service Operations Michael Shaffer at 484-4600 ext. 311.

Area residents should be advised that, as crews flush fire hydrants, there may be some discoloration of the water. If rust-colored water is experienced, simply run the cold water tap for a few minutes to let the water clear. Please keep in mind not to wash any light colored clothing until the water is running clear.

YCUA's semiannual newsletter dedicated to enhancing water and wastewater services.

From The Director

As winter approaches, it’s important to remember that freezing temperatures can put the water pipes in your home at risk. Severe winter weather can cause your pipes to freeze and even possibly burst. These tips can help you safeguard your water pipes against freezing:

- Locate the main water supply and water heater valves in case you need to access them quickly in an emergency.
- If a sink is against an outside wall, open the under-sink cabinet doors to allow the circulation of warm air from inside the home.
- Wind drafts during severe cold can increase the chance of pipes freezing. Near exterior walls, windows, and in crawl spaces, seal drafts and wrap pipes with insulation or heating tape.
- During severe winter weather, keep a faucet open slightly and dripping.
- Learn the location of your water meter and take the above precautions to keep it from freezing, especially if your meter is located in unheated basement or crawl space.
- Consider keeping your basement heated and installing window weather stripping.
- Shut off water supply valves if you plan to be away from home for an extended period of time.

In the event that you experience a burst pipe in your home and your main shut off is not working properly or you have trouble locating or closing it, please call YCUA at 484-4600. - Jeff Castro, YCUA Director
Ways to Reduce the Threat of Sewage Backups

Sewage backups are unpleasant, potentially hazardous to your health, and difficult and expensive to clean up. All plumbing carries risk of a sewage backup, but homes in places that commonly flood, get heavy rain, or are in older neighborhoods are particularly prone to backups. You'll know a sewage backup has occurred if water or waste is coming up through floor drains in the basement (if you have one) or sink drains.

Blockages are often the result of shrubs and tree roots, which can cause extensive damage and cracking when they seep into the joints of the pipeline. One way to prevent tree root damage is to replace your line and tap with new plastic pipe. Homeowners can contact a qualified plumber to clean and televise their service lead to locate problem areas.

Paper products are another common cause of sewer lead backups. Paper towels, facial tissue, diapers, “flushable” wipes, and feminine products can cause many problems in a property owner’s lateral because they do not deteriorate as quickly as toilet paper does.

FOG (Fats, Oils, and Grease) is another concern. Cooking oil should be poured into a heat-resistant container and disposed of properly after it cools off, not poured into sink drains. If discarded in a sink, oils will solidify, causing the line to constrict and eventually clog.

In addition to problems that can occur in your home’s service lead, in most instances, municipal wastewater utilities are not responsible for sewer main backups that occur as a result of an “Act of God” such as extreme rain or snow melt events. In 2001, the State of Michigan adopted Public Act 222, known as the Sewage Event Claims Act. It provides that municipalities are not liable for sewer backup damages unless the backup is caused by a defect in the public sewer system of which the municipality was aware but failed to correct in a reasonable amount of time.

You can reduce the likelihood of sewer backflows entering your home by having a plumber install a backwater prevention valve, which is a check valve installed into a sewer line (or sometimes into a drain line). A properly installed and maintained backwater valve allows sewage to go out, but not to come back in.

In general, sewer backups are not covered under standard home insurance policies. Specific coverage for sewage backups should be added to your home insurance policy in the form of a sewage backup rider.

Public Act 222 also establishes a procedure for a property owner to follow when making a claim for sewer backup damages. If a backup occurs at your home, contact YCUA, 24 hours a day, at 734-484-4600, and select the “Service Center” option on the phone menu. YCUA will send staff to your home to investigate and provide you with a sewer backup claim form. If you believe the backup is YCUA’s responsibility, complete and file the claim form with YCUA within 45 days from when the backup is discovered. Claim forms are also available by calling YCUA or by going online to YCUA’s website at www.ycua.org.

Clean up costs and all damages caused by a sewer backup are the responsibility of the homeowner unless YCUA is liable under Public Act 222. Therefore, YCUA recommends that all homeowners (and renters) have insurance that includes coverage for property damage caused by a sewer backup and that you contact YCUA and your insurance company immediately in the event of a sewer backup in your home or leased space. Take before and after photos of the affected areas and itemize any property losses. Save all receipts related to repairs, cleaning, or damages.

Responding quickly is critical to preventing further damage and health risks from a sewage backup.
YCUA to the Rescue

Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority has had its own in-house Confined Space Rescue Team since 1994. A confined space is an enclosed area with limited space and accessibility. Some examples are the interior of a storage tank, pipe, silo, or underground vault. These spaces are occasionally entered by workers for maintenance but are otherwise not a habitable space. It is federally and state-mandated that employees who work in confined spaces have an emergency rescue team on standby if the conditions meet the hazard requirements.

YCUA’s Confined Space Rescue Team, past and present, is comprised of employee volunteers that have asked to take on a leadership role in not only more responsibility but to also protect their fellow coworkers. The rescue team, on occasion, performs rescue standbys for Authority employees and contracted workers who perform work in confined spaces.

These team members are highly trained in rope rescue, supplied-air rescue, CPR, first aid, and hazard awareness to name a few. Specialized training for these team members comes to them via a contracted agency that consists of members of the Washtenaw County Technical Rescue Team along with annual continuing training modules in confined spaces, fall protection, and in YCUA’s own specialized equipment preparation.

Rescue team members are on call 24-7 and dispatched when needed within minutes on most occasions. If you are ever out and see YCUA crews working, our rescue team members stand out with their distinctive red rescue helmets, red harnesses, and high visibility team apparel.

Other benefits of having an in-house rescue team are the savings in time and resources. An outside contracted rescue team agency is costly and can possibly extend service interruptions for the public while waiting to secure an outside contracted confined space rescue team. When our rescue team members are not performing rescue services for our many departments, they carry out their normal daily job duties as water and wastewater operators and mechanical, service, and meter technicians.

YCUA Confined Space Rescue Team members are another shining example of employee dedication, not only to the Authority but to the public that they serve as well.

YCUA’s Sewer Preventative Maintenance Program

The purpose of YCUA’s sewer preventative maintenance program is to assure that the sanitary sewer system is in good working condition and functioning as designed. Crews routinely inspect sewer mains using a remotely controlled video camera. This “televising” of sewer mains allows us to identify obstructions, failed pipe, or offsets in the sewer mains so that repairs can be scheduled.

Sewer cleaning and vacuuming machines called vactors are used to remove from the mains obstructions such as debris, roots, soaps, and grease that are found by the remotely controlled video cameras.

As part of the preventative maintenance program, crews also inspect manholes for structural defects and flow.

By utilizing this program, YCUA greatly reduces sanitary sewer main issues within our system that could potentially affect our customers.

If you are experiencing a sewer problem, please notify YCUA at 484-4600 ext. 311 so our service crews can inspect the sewer main manholes nearest the address affected. If it is determined that the problem is in the sanitary sewer main, YCUA will address the issue. If it is determined that the condition of the sewer main is normal, the homeowner is responsible for cleaning their own sanitary service lead.

“Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.”
- Albert Camus
YCUA’s “Get the Lead Out” Webpage Coming Soon

YCUA is taking a proactive approach to identifying lead service lines in our service area with our upcoming “Get the Lead Out” program. We will soon be launching a new webpage geared toward helping residents understand how lead can enter drinking water from the wearing away of materials in a building’s lead plumbing and how to identify the type of service line in your home. Check back at www.ycua.org for more information.

It’s Time To Winterize!

The time to prepare your home for winter is before the freezing temperatures and snow arrive. Follow these tips to help prevent frozen pipes in your home:

- Disconnect outdoor hoses and make sure hose bibs are not dripping.
- Insulate pipes in unheated areas or seal off unheated areas.
- Find your water meter shutoff so if a break does occur, you can turn off your water service quickly.
- If you have an in-ground sprinkler system, contact your irrigation professional about scheduling an appointment to have your system thoroughly winterized.
- If your home’s water will be turned off for winter, there should be heat to protect the meter as well as the plumbing.
- YCUA recommends that customers winterize their homes just in case there is a complete power outage.

Did You Know?

With winter rapidly approaching, you can check the YCUA Facebook page for up-to-date information on water main breaks and other water-related emergencies.

Like our page at: www.facebook.com/ypsilanticommunityutilitiesauthority to receive important water service updates in your news feed along with customer news, tips on how to save money on your water bills, and much more.

Holiday Closings

YCUA is closed on the following dates:

November 11 - Veterans’ Day
November 28 & 29 - Thanksgiving
December 24 & 25 - Christmas
Dec. 31 & Jan. 1 - New Year

We wish our customers a safe and enjoyable holiday season!

Need more information?

Please visit us at www.ycua.org or call 734-484-4600