

LITTLE THINGS

By Jonathon Barnes

There are times as a Circuit Rider that I ponder why I just drove 2 hours to assist with something that was merely less than 100ft away on a service valve. Those are the easy days. As I pondered this, it reminded me of things that I think would assist everyone in our water industry. Here are a few of the little things I would highly suggest.

1. If you have a leak that is recordable in your daily usage and its making noise on anything from a yard hydrant, service valve, fire hydrant or water coming up from the ground; I HIGHLY suggest listening to ALL the valves within the near 200ft. Odds are you will find whether it is a service leak or be able to distinguish if it is a main line leak. None the less, you will know which valves are operable and which are not, which is key to investigation and pinpointing and stopping the issue.
2. Water loss showing itself in manholes or drain inlets are not always right nearby. I have seen many leaks that are hundreds of feet away from the spot where the water is visibly showing itself through the easiest path. Again, listen on all valves nearby or even further for any noise and start investigating and narrowing down the loudest listening.
3. I keep hearing operation specialists speak of hearing the FLOW. Hearing flow through your hydrant or a service valve is not a common scenario. If there is definitive noise that you can hear outside of extraneous traffic and wind, powerline transformers, sump pumps, factory equipment nearby, highways, well house pumps, and yes including your vehicle you parked next to the hydrant to get out of and listen, then your leak is usually somewhere within eyeshot. Again, most times less than 200ft from your loudest found listening point. Find a hydrant or valve that is completely silent and use it as a reference of what "quiet" really is and then listen to the loud one and document noise levels at the same listening criteria.
4. If you assume where your mains and service lines are when listening on the ground, then you probably will not find your leak very easily, if at all. We need to start getting comfortable documenting our mains and services. There are plenty of occasions, when I'm detecting leaks, that if I'm not within 2-3ft of the main the leak noise will be gone entirely. Or the main was on the other side of the road. Our communities that cannot provide accurate information are the hardest to detect. Proper locations with prints or rough maps are IDEAL as locating them through conductive or inductive is not always possible.

5. Valve Exercising and Maintenance. I know it's hard to fit into the schedule of a million other things going on especially during the busy summer months and no one wants to go out and start turning valves in the dead of winter. However, at some point it must become a common practice throughout the year. Many leaks I have located throughout the years are right at the valve and slight adjustment on these valves can make all the difference in stopping the leak. Now that's not to say it solves the problem, but it can bring a quick halt to some leaks in the moment to gather proper materials to make the repair later.
6. Main Line Isolation. I have done several leak calls, where slowing down a leak through turning (2) valves is ideal for repairing, but impossible due to valves not working, or the communities are unaware of the actual layout of the system. When you have two valves closed and two hydrants open to alleviate some pressure or stop it entirely and it's not changing there is more than just a leak issue. Get to know your mains and valves and I revert all to #5!
7. We come out to ASSIST, guide and train. We do not KNOW your system like you do. Your assistance is absolutely critical for our ability to help you in any scenario you may need. You have the information we need in order to conduct our business in helping you. We NEED that information. Without it, that information it is merely guess work. And I don't like guessing. We can all assume, but we all know what happens when we do that. Let's be informed and ready to tackle all these situations with a teamwork effort in mind. You need to include yourselves or other operation specialists and feel free to ask any questions you may have, and we can gladly do our best to provide such answers or find them.

These 7 little things will help us, help you. Hopefully these will get you back on track to minimal water loss sooner. And in all, saving all your customers money and conserving water in the long run. We are here to help you with these issues. Please do not think we are only here to find the leak. Our staff will assist with locating, valve exercising, and other maintenance items in your water system. 💧💧💧

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