

North Vancouver water main break damages 5 homes

District not required to pay for water damage to property

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Water from a broken water main in the 3800-block of St. Marys Avenue in the District of North Vancouver, rushes down Braemar Road Monday evening. Photo David Mueller

A North Vancouver water main ruptured Monday, sending a torrent rushing down nearby streets and damaging five neighbouring properties.

Located at the 3800-block of St. Marys Avenue, the ductileiron pipe ripped open a little after six p.m., flooding a nearby garage, a basement, and a few yards, according to district staff.

Braemar Road resident David Mueller had his spirits dampened after his son opened the door.

"He said, 'Dad, come look!' And I went outside and the street was knee-deep, flowing like a river," he said. "When I walked out there a garbage can was floating by."

District staff managed to shut off the water approximately 20 minutes after the break, although Mueller said it was a wet night for the neighbourhood.

"The fire department was up there in a hurry and it probably took about two-and-a-half to three hours to get that shut right down," he said. "The water went down our street, down Braemar, then it took a left and went straight down St. Georges."

While most of the water washed into a nearby creek, several homes appeared to be damaged, according to Mueller.

"I feel sorry for some of the people because some of the driveways on the south side of Braemar just took the water right in," he said.

The district will not pay for damages to flooded basements, according to district communications officer Jeanine Bratina.

"Unfortunately, municipalities aren't liable for damages sustained to personal property if they are related to a normal

breakdown of the water system," she said.

A hole with a diameter of 25 centimetres was discovered in the pipe, which had been installed in 1971. The cause of the break is unknown but the pipe had not been scheduled for replacement, according to Bratina. Ductile-iron pipe typically has a lifespan of 80 to 100 years.

Mueller spoke to a resident who reported a water main break three years ago, but the two incidents are likely unrelated, according to Bratina.

Heading into the balmy July evening wearing gumboots, Mueller saw children making the best of the unscheduled irrigation.

"The kids were all out playing in the water until the police showed up and said it was probably an unsafe area."

Rocks and gravel ended up strewn on the streets, which had been closed to drivers, Mueller said. "If you had been in a helicopter and looked down you would've seen a river going down the streets," he said.

Things were back to normal by the next morning, according to Mueller.

"It was perfectly, beautifully cleaned up," he said. "You could go out on the street and the street cleaner had come and they had cleaned it all up on our street anyways."

The district dispatched 13 workers over two shifts to clean up the mess. The cleanup is ongoing, according to Bratina.

The district averages approximately 25 water main ruptures each year.

There are approximately 366 kilometres of water main in the district including 70 kilometres of asbestos concrete pipe that has proven prone to sudden failures.

The district is replacing between three and five kilometres of asbestos concrete pipe each year at an annual cost of \$3 million.

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