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DEP Seeks Affordable Water Service Line Protection Proposal

Protection Program Will Spare Homeowners High Cost of Unexpected Repairs and Minimize Disruption and Expense to City of Shutting Down Water Service; Key Milestone of Customer Service Initiative in DEP's Strategic Plan

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway today announced that the Water Board issued a Request for Expressions of Interest from companies willing to provide a water service line protection program to residential properties in New York City. Property owners in New York City are responsible for maintaining their water service lines, which run from inside the property to the city-owned water main in the street. Repairing or replacing a broken or leaking service line can cost up to \$4,000 on average, or result in a termination of service. A protection plan — which is similar to a basic insurance policy — would spare homeowners the costs of unexpected service line repairs and minimize overall disruption to the local community, in exchange for a small monthly fee. The program would also reduce the expense to DEP of shutting down water service on service line leaks that have not been repaired.

"Water service line leaks or breaks can occur unexpectedly, and the costs for fixing them can run up to several thousand dollars," said Commissioner Holloway. "A voluntary service line protection program will give homeowners the option to spend a nominal amount of money each month to save them the expense and frustration of dealing with these unforeseen circumstances on their own. And it will help to prevent further damage to property and the city's infrastructure. Like our recently announced Leak Notification Program, this initiative is part of our effort to provide the best possible services to our 835,000 customers who pay the water bills."

New York City's water distribution system, which is operated and maintained by DEP, has 835,000 accounts, of which 760,000 are residential accounts that connect to the system through private water service lines. A significant majority of water infrastructure leaks that DEP responds to involve private service lines that connect customer properties to the distribution system. In 2010, DEP field crews responded

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to 4,403 total leak complaints citywide. Of this number, 3,508 were deemed to be private service line leaks — roughly 80% of all DEP responses. For all such leaks, DEP is required to respond, inspect, issue a repair notice, and, if necessary, terminate service.

Service line leaks are unpredictable, repairs tend to be expensive, and individual property owners may not be prepared to respond quickly or with full knowledge of what is required to remedy the situation. When a street leak is reported, as part of DEP's response a determination is made on whether the source of the leak is a water main or a private service line. If the leak is on a private service line, DEP generally issues a notice directing that the repair be made in order to protect the roadway and other utilities. If a building owner does not comply and have a contractor repair the service line within three days, DEP terminates water service. Property owners, sometimes with their water service turned off, are often faced with a need to procure services on an emergency basis. This can cause economic hardship as these repairs are expensive and are rarely covered by homeowners insurance. All master plumbers licensed by the Department of Buildings are legally permitted to make necessary repairs.

A service line protection plan would be available to customers who would pay a small monthly premium in exchange for guaranteed repair of a service line break, and it could significantly benefit New York City's water customers by insulating them from high repair costs and providing them with a contractor they can call for timely, high-quality repair when a line breaks. Additionally, the speedy repair of leaking service lines under the program would help reduce damage to owners' property and city infrastructure and minimize the disruption and expense to customers and DEP when water service is shut down because leaks have not been repaired in a timely manner. Through the protection plan offering, the plan provider will arrange and be responsible for the completion of covered repairs. Protection plans have been implemented in cities throughout the country, including Cleveland, Louisville and Pittsburgh.

The Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) will gather information on the qualifications of interested providers; review best practices of existing service offerings; and outline a potential program offering for city property owners that would be tailored to the unique characteristics of city service lines. Important elements of each RFEI submission will include the provider's proposed staffing and maintenance of a 24-7 toll-free call center for program subscribers to notify the protection provider of water service line issues, commitment to respond timely to customers' water service line leaks or other failures, inclusion of local master plumbers in performing repair and replacement services, provision of high-quality repairs that adhere to city codes and include basic restoration of ground surface features, and strong customer service accountability to the Board and DEP for services provided to water customers. The RFEI is available on the Water Board's website www.nyc.gov/nycwaterboard. RFEI submissions will inform the Water Board preparation of a Request for Proposals for the design of a water service line protection program, if advisable.

The service line protection plan is a part of the customer service section outlined in *Strategy 2011-2014*, a far-reaching strategic plan that lays out 100 distinct initiatives to make DEP the safest, most efficient, cost-effective, and transparent water utility in the nation. The new plan, the

product of nearly one year of analysis and outreach, builds on PlaNYC, Mayor Bloomberg's sustainability blueprint for New York City. The plan is available on DEP's website at www.nyc.gov/dep.

DEP manages the city's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City and residents of Ulster, Orange, Putnam and Westchester counties. New York City's water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, and comprises 19 reservoirs, and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,400 miles of sewer lines take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. Approximately 1,000 DEP employees live and work in the watershed communities. For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/dep or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nycwater.

Related Documents and Links

- ▶ [Request for Expressions of Interest – Water Service Line Protection Program \(3/24/11\)](#)

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