



City backs voluntary warranty plan for sewer, water lines

By DOUG CARDER, Herald Staff Writer

Ottawa homeowners will soon have the opportunity to hedge their expenses if a sewer or water line breaks on their property.

The City of Ottawa is endorsing the National League of Cities' Service Line Warranty Program, which will be offered to Ottawa residents, beginning in April.

The program, administered through Service Line Warranties of America, provides warranty coverage for the portion of the sewer and water lines a homeowner is responsible for up to \$4,000 per incident, Brian Davis, SLWA's Southwest regional manager, said.

A letter explaining the program will be mailed to Ottawa homeowners in early April, Davis said.

Davis, who is based in Coppell, Texas, said the purpose of the letter is twofold.

"Some homeowners don't realize they are responsible for their lateral sewer and water line repairs if the lines break. They believe those breaks are the city's responsibility, but that's not the case. So, this letter serves as an educational tool, as well as offers homeowners the chance to sign up for the warranty protection," Davis said.

Davis said the program covers a homeowner's sewer line from the point where it enters the home to the point where the city takes over responsibility, which typically is the line's tie-in to the sewer main. The water line is covered from the point it enters the home to the city's water meter. Those are the portions of the sewer and water lines a homeowner is responsible for in the event of a break or other line failure, he said.

The cost of the program is \$5.95 per month for the sewer line warranty and \$4.50 per month for the water line warranty, Davis said.

The April letter will offer Ottawa residents the sewer warranty coverage, Davis said, but he said homeowners also can purchase the water line protection at that time by contacting Service Line Warranties of America. He said a letter will be sent out in the fall offering Ottawa homeowners the water line coverage.

He said homeowners who sign up for a year's worth of coverage in advance will receive a 7 to 8 percent discount, and they will save an additional 7 to 8 percent if they sign up within 30 days of receiving their April letter.

"The discount is built in so a homeowner can save up to 15 percent," Davis said. He said the same discounts are offered to homeowners who sign up for the water line warranty.

Davis said homeowners can sign up for the program by returning the business reply card attached to the April letter; calling SLWOA's customer service line, (866) 922-9006, or by signing up online via its website, www.slwofa.com

Davis and Richard Nienstedt, Ottawa's city manager, said the program is strictly voluntary and homeowners are under no obligation to participate.

Homeowners also can opt to purchase either the sewer or water service line warranty, but are not obligated to purchase both protections if they so choose, Davis said.

Davis said Service Line Warranties of America will contract with Ottawa and other Franklin County-based plumbers who are licensed to operate in the City of Ottawa to do the repair work.

Service Line Warranties of America's guidelines are very strict for its plumber contractors, Davis said. He added if a plumber fails to show up in a prompt manner or does not fix the line properly, they could be removed from the program's approved contractor list.

"We will use local plumbers, and we ensure the work is done correctly," Davis said. "The coverage is \$4,000 per incident, so 99 percent of the time a homeowner will not see any out-of-pocket expense, unless the repair costs more than \$4,000, which would be rare."

Nienstedt said he and City Commissioner Sara Caylor learned about the program during the National League of Cities' annual meeting last November in Phoenix. He said they were impressed by the program and said they liked the fact the league was endorsing the program.

Caylor told the commission in February she knew an Ottawa homeowner who had just spent about \$2,000 on a water line break. She noted it would take a homeowner a long time to pay enough monthly warranty fees to equal a \$2,000 repair bill.

While explaining the program to the city commission in February, Davis said the monthly fees of \$5.95 for sewer and \$4.50 for water were not special introductory rates that would be increased once a customer signs up with the program. He also said he did not anticipate any rate increases in the foreseeable future.

The service's website indicated more than 100 cities have signed up for the program, ranging in size from Rolfe, Iowa (population 566), to Atlanta (population 540,922).

Davis said homeowners are making good use of the program. He pointed out Dallas suburb Carrollton, Texas, with 40,000 households, signed up for the warranty program last October, and the program already had paid out more than \$35,000 in claims to homeowners there in less than five months.

He said water and sewer line breaks do not just happen at older homes with aging lines. He said new residences are susceptible to breaks too, because of extreme drought or other weather conditions.

"In fact, we paid out more in claims last year for breaks where drought and other weather conditions caused the ground to shift and lines to break than we did for claims due to aging systems," he said.

Davis said the warranty program has been in existence for 10 years and has had the National League of Cities' endorsement for the past two years.

"I'm anticipating we'll have more than 150 cities signed up by the fall," Davis said.

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