



City to offer pipe warranty ***Program to help pay water, sewer repairs***

By Brennan K. Peel

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Abilene residents will soon find invitations in their mailboxes for warranties on water and sewer lines on their property.

The warranties are part of a new program the city of Abilene is launching in partnership with the National League of Cities and Service Line Warranties of America.

“Many citizens are unaware that they are responsible for the sewer lines that go from their house to the utility connection. If these lines break or leak, repairs can be very expensive,” said David Vela, Abilene assistant city manager.

The Service Line Warranty program costs \$4.75 a month and covers sewer line repairs up to \$4,000 per incidence, plus another \$4,000 for public street cutting, if needed.

Water leak occurrences increased considerably last fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30. The city repaired 653 leaks on water lines, up from 505 the year before and 411 before that.

Dry, shifting soil and customers using more water caused more leaks this year, said Wayne Lisenbee, assistant director of water utilities.

About a third of the city’s water lines are made of cast-iron, a third of concrete and a third of PVC, he said. Cast-iron pipes typically leak more often, Lisenbee said. In all, there are more than 900 miles of water lines, and another 660 miles of sewer lines.

“You could go to the Grand Canyon and still have 100 miles leftover,” he said

about the length of water lines underground in Abilene.

The city won't use any taxpayer money to promote the warranty program.

"We entered into a marketing agreement with SLWA. This agreement allows them to use our city logo to market their products to our residents," Vela said. "The city also approved and signed off on a letter that will go out to residents very soon. We were approached by SLWA about this program."

Water and sewer line warranties are offered separately through the company.

The National League of Cities, a nonprofit organization that advocates for municipal governments, selected Service Line Warranties of America because of the company's A+ rating with the Better Business Bureau.

"We are pleased to partner with the city of Abilene in bringing peace of mind to homeowners in Abilene through an affordable Service Line Warranty program," Brad Carmichael, vice president of business development for Service Line Warranties of America, said in a news release. "We think Abilene residents will be pleased with our features and benefits, including 24/7 repair service using local, certified technicians. This keeps dollars in the local economy, an important benefit in these tough economic times."

The city does not participate in the warranty program.

"We have the personnel and equipment to make repairs ourselves," Vela said. "The average homeowner does not. So we do not participate in the program."