



## **More than 4,000 Abilene households enrolled in water and sewer line warranty program**

***Program covers water, sewer line repairs up to \$4K***

*By Brennan K. Peel*

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Sometime amid loosening your belt, sneaking a quick post-turkey nap and watching football you'll have to tackle that stack of Thanksgiving Day dishes.

When you do, avoid a potential disaster of steep costs and backed-up lines by keeping fats, oils and grease out of the drain.

Each year cities and water and sewer utility companies urge residents to keep drains FOG-free — that's fats, oils and grease — an issue that becomes particularly problematic around the holidays, when more people are cooking and more dishes need washing.

FOGs can clog drains and pipes and contaminate the water supply, according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Grease clogs can cost thousands of dollars to repair.

“Many residents 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,” Abilene Deputy City Manager David Vela said.

More than 4,000 Abilene households insured themselves against such repairs by enrolling in a program launched last month by the city in partnership with the National League of Cities and Service Line Warranties of America.

The program provides homeowners up to \$4,000 to cover water or sewer line repairs per incidence, plus another \$4,000 if street cuts are necessary. The program costs \$4.75 a month.

Utility Service Partner, Inc., which administers the program, hoped to have 8 to 10 percent of owner-occupied houses in Abilene enroll in the program. So far 17.29 percent have, said Brian Davis of Utility Service Partner.

Similar programs are offered in 19 other states and hundreds of communities across

Texas.

Residents received mail notifications in October with information about the program.

The city did not use taxpayer money to promote the program and does not participate in the warranty.

“We entered into a marketing agreement with SLWA,” Vela said. “This agreement allows them to use our city logo to market their products to our residents.”

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.

The program uses local, certified technicians to “keep dollars in the local economy, an important benefit in these tough economic times,” said Brad Carmichael, vice president of business development for Service Line Warranties of America.

The water line warranty program likely would have been a boon for many residents this summer, when record drought and heat shifted soils, snapping water lines.

Between Oct. 1, 2010, and Sept. 30, 2011, the city repaired 653 water line leaks, up from 505 the year before and 411 the year before then.

In all there are more than 900 miles of water lines, and another 660 miles of sewer lines.