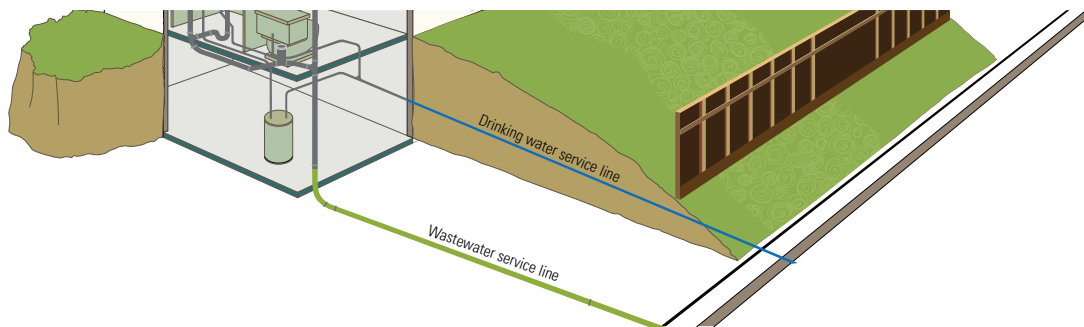




Prairie Village And Roeland Park Offer Sewer & Water Line Warranties

November 14, 2011



More and more homeowners are realizing that the sewer and water lines between the home and the street connection are the responsibility of the property owner. If a breakage occurs, they're financially responsible. Two cities in Johnson County (Prairie Village and Roeland Park) have teamed with a private company to offer citizens a chance to buy warranties on their sewer and water lines:

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The two Johnson County cities have joined a growing number of municipalities across the country in touting peace of mind for homeowners for just a small monthly fee.

It's not a scam. In fact, it's backed by the National League of Cities, and similar services are on the way to much of the rest of the Kansas City area.

But it's also a marketing strategy by a private company that uses a city's logo on a letter, above the mayor's name, to get its pitch before potential customers.

It works. More than 12 percent of 7,800 households in Prairie Village that received that letter recently have signed up, according to Dennis Enslinger, assistant city administrator.

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The private company, Utility Service Partners, Inc., has produced the following video to illustrate the benefits to citizens (and the local governments that get a cut of the insurance premium): **Watch the video.**

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City Hall, in return, gets a 10 percent cut of the premiums.

Technically, it's not insurance but a warranty to protect homeowners from the cost of repairing sewer or water lines that may break between their house and the connection to the sewer main or water meter. Many property owners may not realize they are responsible for those sections, which can cost thousands of dollars to repair in an emergency. Homeowners' insurance policies typically do not cover such repairs.

But Service Line Warranties of America does. In return for an introductory price of \$5.50 a month or \$59 a year, the company will dispatch a local plumber immediately and pay up to \$4,000 to repair a broken line. It'll pay another \$4,000 if the job requires cutting up the street.

The plan's 24-hour hotline offers simplicity to "a busy homeowner who has better things to do than search for contractors and negotiate a fair price," according to the company's website.

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Roeland Park City Administrator Aaron Otto said the city isn't trying to twist any arms.

"It was made clear in the first sentence that this was a voluntary program," Otto said.

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Utility Service Partners, the parent company, calls its arrangements with municipalities "co-branded marketing services agreements."

According to a National League of Cities fact sheet, the use of a city's return address on the outside of the envelope "drives a very high 'open rate' and the city seal and signature lend credibility to the offer, thus driving a much higher enrollment rate."

The insurance company also notes that the city's image is enhanced because the public sees the warranty program as a service offered by the city.

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