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## \$20M committed to stop leaks: Water main breaks account for 4.6 per cent of usage: [Final Edition]

Brooymans, Hanneke. **Edmonton Journal** [Edmonton, Alta] 23 Aug 2003: B.1.Fro.

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### Abstract (summary)

By the mid-'80s there were as many as 1,500 main breaks a year cutting off water supplies and flooding streets, says Steve Stanley, Epcor's director of operations for water services.

Early cast-iron pipes were made by those adept at making thick military cannons, said Duncan Ellison, executive director of the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association. So it's not surprising that cast-iron pipes from early in the 20th century are lasting longer than some of the pipes made in the '50s, he said.

Colour Photo: Ed Kaiser, The Journal / Epcor workers Heather Harasymchuk, left, Ryan Denesik, right, and Steve Harasymchuk, top, look through cast iron, plastic PVC and wooden water pipe joints respectively on Friday. Epcor is doubling its spending to \$20 million to patch the city's aging water system next year.

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### Full Text

Ran with fact box "Water Loss", which has been appended to this story.

EDMONTON - Epcor will double its annual spending to patch up the city's aging, leaky water system next year, to \$20 million.

Since the first water distribution lines were laid in the Rosedale area 100 years ago, pipes have changed from wood, shaped by barrel makers, to stolid cast-iron cylinders and modern-day PVC pipes.

But like aging arteries, water mains began showing their age in a most inconvenient manner.

By the mid-'80s there were as many as 1,500 main breaks a year cutting off water supplies and flooding streets, says Steve Stanley, Epcor's director of operations for water services.

That's when the city started replacing one per cent of the distribution system each year. Since then, water main breaks have simmered down to about 550 a year.

"But what we've noticed over the last few years is that has remained relatively constant," Stanley said.

"To get further improvements, we're putting more investments into further reducing that number."

Epcor's new spending will boost its repair rate to almost two per cent of the distribution system annually.

Aging water systems cost cities millions of litres of water every year.

System leaks may account for as much as 30 per cent of some municipal water usage, says a report released this week by the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria.

Edmonton's water system fares much better than that, achieving 4.6 per cent, Stanley said.

The industry considers getting below 10 per cent as a challenge, he added.

"We've been under five per cent on average for the last number of years."

The reason is a performance standard set by Epcor's shareholder, the city, which sees that the company puts money into the system and maintains the assets properly.

In that program, Epcor commits to be below 4.7-per-cent water loss and if it doesn't meet it there are penalties, Stanley said.

A report this week by the Canada West Foundation says it is estimated that more than 50 per cent of water supply lines need repair.

Stanley said Edmonton lines are in much better shape.

"I don't know what the number would be, but it would be much, much less than that."

Epcor decides where to do repairs by the number of main breaks in an area, water-quality issues and test results, he said.

It replaced the last of the wooden pipes as late as 1995.

"What is somewhat interesting is age isn't necessarily the only factor in determining what we replace."

Stanley said regular testing shows that older cast-iron pipes are often in good

shape.

"Some stuff that was put in in the 1950s that was a different type of cast iron, it seems to be in poorer condition."

The 1950s-era pipes make up 20 to 25 per cent of the company's inventory, Stanley said.

Early cast-iron pipes were made by those adept at making thick military cannons, said Duncan Ellison, executive director of the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association. So it's not surprising that cast-iron pipes from early in the 20th century are lasting longer than some of the pipes made in the '50s, he said.

Ellison said the latest PVC pipes are expected to last 100 years.

Edmonton's planned replacement rate will be unusually high, he noted.

"It may be they're anticipating failures in the coming years and they're trying to get ahead of the curve."

Not that he finds anything wrong with that.

"It's like, do you wait until your brakes fail before you replace the brakes?"

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#### WATER LOSS

Epcor says it loses about 4.7 per cent of the water it produces.

That works out to almost 6,300 Olympic-sized swimming pools, given that it distributed 134 billion litres of water last year.

#### Illustration

Colour Photo: Ed Kaiser, The Journal / Epcor workers Heather Harasymchuk, left, Ryan Denesik, right, and Steve Harasymchuk, top, look through cast iron, plastic PVC and wooden water pipe joints respectively on Friday. Epcor is doubling its spending to \$20 million to patch the city's aging water system next year.

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