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Niagara Falls Water Board Program Targets Citywide System Leaks

Niagara Falls, NY – Today the Niagara Falls Water Board (NFWB) announced that it has initiated a basic, but effective program to detect leaks in the overall water distribution system, which is already showing early positive results. Water Board employees have commenced work in various areas of the City by pulling manhole covers to visually observe flow through the sewer, thereby helping to detect specific abnormal flows that suggest a nearby water main leak. When such abnormal flow is discovered, the Water Board dispatches its state-of-the-art camera truck for further investigation. The NFWB workers simultaneously document the condition of the manholes and catch basins along the route, and gather data to update the Board's geographic information system (GIS), which provides accurate system maps and helps plan maintenance and capital projects.

"Unmetered water flow that is produced by the Water Treatment Plant, but which does not pass through a meter and does not generate revenue, has been a longstanding and slowly growing problem for the Water Board," says NFWB Superintendent Bill Wright. "This includes water used for fire suppression and other authorized uses, but mostly the issue is driven by leaks and theft of water through unauthorized taps into mains. When sewers show high flows in dry weather in areas where there are not active large users, it may suggest nearby water loss. The Water Board has had acoustic leak surveys performed in the past, but the geology of the City has caused inaccurate results."

The NFWB—which is an agency independent from the City of Niagara Falls—also recently solicited proposals to install high-tech leak monitoring in fire hydrants.

"We still are exploring that technology, but the cost to monitor just a small area of the City was going to exceed \$200,000 and would take a while to implement," said Board Chairman Nicholas Forster. "The Board therefore backed this measure because it has an immediate impact at relatively limited cost. And public reception of the program has thus far been positive."

"People are interested to see and hear what is happening when we are working outside," said Collection and Distribution Supervisor Michael Eagler. "For years, the Water Board dealt with a so-so reputation when it came to timely system fixes within the streets, but these days it is a point of pride for the organization to fix fire hydrants and leaks within days at the most, not

weeks or months. We even created signs that read ‘Water Sewer Inspection’ to let ratepayers know what we are doing in their area.”

“While doing inspections, ratepayers will approach us and ask about the process, continued Eagler. “After explaining, most folks appreciate that we are taking a proactive approach and not just a reactive effort. The Water Board welcomes the community’s help in reporting leaks and possible water theft, as communication and cooperation are key to success.”

In the first two weeks of the program, the following results have been accomplished—which is over and above regular daily work performed by the outside maintenance crews:

- Assessments have been completed on 239 manholes;
- 2 water leaks were found and repaired;
- 27 catch basins were cleaned;
- 6 manhole entries by personnel were completed to remove large objects from the main;
- 10 manholes were cleaned with the vacuum truck;
- 2,560 feet of combined sewer main have been jetted and cleaned; and
- 22 manholes have been added to the Water Board’s electronic mapping and maintenance applications to improve system management and maintenance planning.

“It’s really a basic approach, but it is working,” concluded Wright. “To solve the unmetered water program, we are going to need to work with some high-tech leak detection solutions as well, but for now this basic program has many benefits and is a great start.”

For more information on the NFWB, go to: www.NFWB.org.

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About the Niagara Falls Water Board:

The Niagara Falls Water Board is a public benefit corporation created in 2002 by a special act of the New York State Legislature. Its mission is to provide safe and reliable water and wastewater management services to our community in an economical and efficient manner. In 2003, it acquired the drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems previously owned and operated by the City of Niagara Falls, a separate municipal entity. It owns and operates a water treatment plant, a wastewater treatment plant, a pumping station located in the Niagara Gorge, two elevated water storage tanks, seven lift stations, and more than 500 miles of water and sewer service lines. The Water Board serves nearly 18,000 residential, commercial, and industrial users.