

## ARE YOUR HYDRANTS BEING PROPERLY MAINTAINED?

By Mike Stanzel, Circuit Rider

Being a water operator and doing town maintenance, you can acquire a list of responsibilities a mile long. So I completely understand when something gets overlooked, neglected or put off.

The inspiration for this article came from the fact that I assisted with repairing 5-6 hydrants in the past 6 months. Let's get this out in the open first. I am not an EXPERT on fire hydrants by any means but I do enjoy learning and refreshing my brain due to the fact that I don't repair them very often and there are so many different brands.

I believe a hydrant gets overlooked because it just sits there on the corner or the end of the line just waiting and waiting and waiting to get used. I mean, realistically, they are for fighting fires, correct? And how many house fires do we get in towns on a yearly basis? Maybe 1 or 2, but you might have 20-200 plus fire hydrants depending on the size of your town, and frankly it's a lot of work to maintain them. Not to mention the cost of replacing inoperable hydrants can be in excess of \$2000 each.

I have done a lot of leak detection in my 8 years with NeRWA and I have literally listened to thousands of hydrants. Some amaze me by their shape, style and color but mostly by the age of some of them that are still in service. I have seen some dating back to the early 1900's. So a piece of advice, when replacing the old ones, SAVE them as they are worth quite a bit of money as people pay dearly to turn them into yard ornaments.

So back to the maintenance part, a lot of hydrants sit idle as some towns don't have a flushing program. Some towns rely on the Fire Department to flush, which is fine but the operator should still be involved. It's a good practice to flow test the hydrants with the Fire Department so you know which ones flow more water and can label them accordingly.

As with all valves, if hydrants are not being exercised regularly, they can become hard to operate. Most have a set screw on the top bonnet so they can be lubricated with oil. A lot of times we find that when there is no oil at all, they tend to seize up. It's actually pretty simple to fix. If one is hard to open, take it apart, clean everything, lubricate and reassemble. Most recently we repaired one that would not open and when we were finished, we could open and close it with one hand effortlessly.

Another thing is to make sure the caps, including the steamer, are easily removable. This can be done by putting anti-seize on the threads. You certainly don't want it falling back on the city if a house catches fire and the Fire Department cannot get water out of the closest hydrant. It's a lawsuit waiting to happen.

Make sure your hydrants are free from debris, weeds, trees, shrubs, etc. and easily accessible especially in the winter. I've seen a lot of towns put a note in their water bills or local paper asking residents to scoop the snow away from the hydrants in front of their property in the winter and have had excellent results.

So if you need assistance with evaluating your fire hydrants please contact me at 402-672-9084 or [mike@nerwa.org](mailto:mike@nerwa.org).