

My Own Front Yard  
By Pat Petersen, Training Specialist

As I walked through my utility room to change my furnace filter I happened to look down at my water meter and the valve right in front of it. I won't say panic set in but I knew this problem needed to be addressed. The valve handle was corroding right before my eyes. I figured I would call the water operators in town and ask them if they had time to make sure my curb stop worked so I could be a weekend plumber. When Eric and Tom (the water operators) called me back, they weren't too excited. "We're going to have to dig it up," was what they said. They had tried for several hours to get on it but it seemed as if it was off to the side and the stop box (pipe leading to the actual curb stop) was full of mud. After 21 years of being a water operator I knew the importance of being able to control your water service whether it be the valve by the meter or the curb stop in your yard. You know, when you get that call at midnight that someone's water line broke in their finished basement and their valve by the meter won't turn so your only hope is an easy to find and operational curb stop! Those are the things I remember! At first I thought this may get messy, but then I realized it would make a good article for our quarterly magazine.

When the plumbers showed up we tried to get the wrench down through the curb stop box and onto the curb stop one last time. The box was full of mud and seemed to have no bottom at all, so something was terribly wrong. Instead of using a backhoe to rip through my front yard the plumbers used a Jet Vac. This is a method which uses high pressure water to break up the soil and a vacuum to suck out the watery mud. After vacuuming out about 3 feet of mud, the stop box fell off to the side which immediately showed that the top half had either rotted or broke and was not even close to being lined up to access the curb stop. After finding the lower half of the box, which was about 14 inches south of where the top half was, we cleaned it out and were able to get on the actual stop. This was great news but we still had to address the broken box.

After some discussion the plumbers thought maybe it would be better to get a backhoe to finish the job since we now had figured out the problem, but with a little convincing from Eric, they decided to keep jetting alongside the stop box and get to the curb stop. One good thing we found was that my water line is 7 foot

underground so I shouldn't have to worry about it freezing! With a hole measuring 1 foot by 3 feet and 7 feet deep our next question was, how are we going to get this old curb stop box broken loose from the actual valve in the ground? What the plumber showed us next was pretty ingenious.

The jaws of a pipe wrench attached to a long rod were lowered into the small hole and placed on the old stop box. By using another pipe wrench on the rod near the top of the hole, they were able to break it loose and actually remove it from the curb stop. It took a little influencing but it was removed without incident. Once again, all of this was done in a hole the size of a large shoe box. Now let's get the new box on the curb stop and finish this project.

The city had some stop boxes but none of them were really long enough and it's always good to try and keep them nearly flush with the top of the ground. A two and a half foot extension was added and now it was at ground level....perfect! We put the wrench on the curb stop, made sure it was operational and then began to fill our excavation. No big dump trucks of dirt were needed. Just a half a bucket of sand and half a bucket of dirt. That's it!

And just like that, this project was complete, no ripping up the lawn, no heavy equipment tracks across the yard and no extra expense for the bigger piece of machinery. For those of you who have or use the jet-vac for excavating you know how versatile this thing is. Many utility companies will use them for pot-holing other utilities to save them from damage, now we see them being used for simple excavations like this one that took place in my front yard.

A few tidbits of advice from my curb stop debacle. It is always good to know where your curb stop is, and even more important, to make sure that it is operational and it actually stops the water in the case of an emergency. As a water operator it is also good to know if they work or need attention. It could save a headache! Oh, and did I mention, I have a brand new shiny brass valve in place right in front of my meter!

I almost forgot to mention, the Nebraska Rural Water Annual Conference is only a couple of months away! The dates are March 9-11, 2020 at the Younes Center in Kearney again. I'm sure I speak for several water and wastewater operators

throughout the state and that is, I hope Mother Nature will be much nicer this year. See you in Kearney!