



## Ask the Experts

Each issue, we ask members of the *On Tap* Editorial Advisory Board to answer a drinking water-related question. We then print as many responses as space permits.

### *How important is a valve-exercising program and how often should you implement such a program?*

#### **Important Program for All Water Systems**

An annual valve-operating program is as important to small systems as large ones. The primary difference is a large system may actually have a dedicated person to perform this function, possibly coordinated with their hydrant maintenance program.

There are two primary reasons for exercising valves:

1. The first and most important is to ensure water technicians are familiar with where the valves are located so that they can find them quickly during an emergency.
2. The second is to be able to isolate the part of the system that needs to be worked on so that the entire system doesn't have to be shut down for repair, increasing the risk contamination and necessity for more flushing or possibly disinfection.

Typical problems with most of the systems that we acquired are that we often cannot find shut-off valves. In many instances, valves were never installed in the first place. In other cases, they have been completely buried under dirt or asphalt. We have also found many strange items stuck down the valve box, including in one instance golf balls (we had to take a shop vacuum into the field to remove them). It seems that occasionally these important holes in the ground offer a source of entertainment.

We are continually working on locating and mapping valves as we find them. We strive to exercise our valves on an annual basis. However, we also want to make sure that people who have experience in properly opening and closing a valve, and especially hydrants, are the people who run the program. We could probably do more work with our local fire departments, particularly to ensure that those with volunteer firefighters are properly trained. But our most pressing concern, has been those that directly

connect to our hydrants to fill tanker trucks. Our plan is to mail out notices to some of the worst offenders in the area and offer to inspect and test backflow prevention devices on their vehicles for a small fee before allowing them to "officially" use our hydrants. Otherwise, we will be informing them that it will be considered a threat, unless of course it's for fire-fighting purposes, which may only encourage the worst offenders to move down the road to the next water system.



**Lisa Raysby**

Water Department Manager  
Peninsula [Washington] Light Company

#### **Big Issue for Reservations**

I will say that valve-exercising programs have always been a "big issue" for reservation water systems. And it is something that we always promote, but often it does not seem to get accomplished. When you think about it, this is probably more important for the smaller systems than for the larger systems. Smaller systems tend to not have as much flexibility (or redundancy) in their piping distribution system. Therefore, when they experience a leak and have to do repairs, and a valve doesn't work because it has not been exercised routinely, they end up shutting a lot more people off while they make those repairs. Larger systems can often route water from a different direction and keep more customers in service.



**Rodney L. Coker**

Tribal Utility Consultant (retired)  
Indian Health Service