

# Rusty pipes spur water rate spike

**36 per cent hike to start this August**

**Don Lajoie, Windsor Star**

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Water rates will jump a whopping 36 per cent this year to begin paying for the replacement of the city's obsolete, leaky and corrosion-encrusted water mains, the Windsor Utilities Commission decided Thursday.

The increase will boost the average residential water bill to \$298.05 from \$219 annually.

The increase, effective Aug. 1, will go toward investing \$600 million over the next 30 years for overdue water main replacement.

**CRUMBLING:** John Wladarski, chief operating officer for the Windsor Utilities Commission, displays two sections of water main which carry drinking water to our homes. WUC jacked up rates by 36 per cent Thursday to help pay for the replacement of aging water mains.



WUC board members hastened to point out that even with the increase, Windsor water charges remain among the lowest in Ontario and about half the rates in neighbouring water systems.

## EXCEEDS STANDARDS

Quality, due to "state of the art" water treatment, exceeds Ontario standards.

John Wladarski, WUC chief operating officer, told the commission 60 per cent of the 1,026 kilometres of water mains beneath the city are at or beyond their expected engineering life expectancy. Twenty-nine per cent are more than 80 years old, 37 per cent are more than 60 and 51 per cent are more than 40 years old.

To make their case and sell the rate increase to the public, the commissioners and Mayor Eddie Francis brought a crate of rusty, cast-iron pipes, the insides encrusted with hardened "scale" corrosion -- several centimetres thick in some spots -- into the meeting.

The continued use of the obsolete equipment, the report states, requires additional chemicals and water treatment, lowers water pressure, elevates the risk of bacterial occurrences, possibly leading to the need for boil-water advisories in the future, and puts the entire system at risk of breakdown.

#### LOSE 15 PER CENT

"We lose, on average, 15 per cent of our water because of the pipes," said Francis, noting the degree of loss was 34 per cent in the first quarter of this year, due to winter conditions. "Imagine if a delivery truck lost 15 per cent of its load on every trip ... or 34 per cent in one quarter. What does that cost us?"

The loss in undelivered water is \$2 million a year, according to WUC staff. Wladarski's report showed "brittle" cast-iron pipes leak or break 22 times a year for every 100 kilometres, compared with the Ontario average of nine. The cost of repairs, he said, can run between \$500 and \$2,400 per metre.

"It's not like you put these pipes in the ground once and they last forever," said Francis, referring to the corroded pipes on display. "It's scary, but these pipes are typical of the old neighbourhood pipes throughout the City of Windsor."

If the system is not upgraded, Wladarski predicted the possibility of "multiple system failures with thousands left without water" in the future.

"Obviously we can't replace all these overnight," he said, "or even in two years or 10 years. There is static growth in Windsor right now, but increasing demand will return."

"What's clogging these pipes?" asked WUC chairman Ken Lewenza Jr. "Really, it's years of complacency about the condition of our infrastructure. When we let the grass (on city property) grow a little to save money, people complain. But these pipes are underground and no one sees them.

"Once we explain this, the public will be supportive.... Or the reality may be that one day people will turn on their taps and the water won't come on and it won't be fixed in a day or two."

WUC member George Sandala added that investing now to save higher costs in the future is the prudent and responsible decision.

He said it was an investment in the city's future, likening it to parents putting money away for their children's education.