



On the Water Front

February 2021

| A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO

El Paso Water Freeze Preparations Pay Off

The freeze of 2011 yielded a lot of powerful lessons for El Paso Water. The biggest: we needed to be better prepared for the effects of below-freezing temperatures on our facilities, equipment and energy supply.

This month's cold snap was not quite as severe as the historic temperatures we experienced in 2011, but it did put our systems and people to the test, and I'm happy to report that El Paso Water fared well.



Freeze of 2011.

We learned in 2011 that our equipment, instrumentation and pipes were vulnerable to extremely cold temperatures. System problems and bursting pipes at homes and businesses across the city resulted in depleted reservoirs, and millions of gallons of water lost.

Additionally, electric power issues hindered our ability to pump water across the city. Parts of the system were crippled, except for our wastewater plants, which were equipped with emergency generators. The crisis served as a wakeup call for us.



Insulation of pipes.

Investments made

The investments we have made since 2011 – more than \$40 million worth – helped us avoid major water outages during this month's cold front.

One of the first priorities was to add more insulation and build enclosed heated spaces to prevent our exposed pipes and equipment from freezing. We improved instrumentation to allow for better controls at our water tanks and reservoirs. We implemented a fuel management strategy for backup power systems



Enclosed and heated pump stations.

to make sure systems are ready at all times.

Another priority was installing 71 backup power generators at our wells, booster stations, plants and facilities to ensure we can still operate with the loss of power.

The freeze also revealed a need for additional water storage. The new 2.5-million-gallon Memphis Elevated Water Storage Reservoir and the 4.4-million-gallon Airport Reservoir ensure water reliability by meeting demands in emergency and peak hours in central and east El Paso, areas that suffered in 2011.

Prepared and Committed Teams

Just as important as our investments in infrastructure, we have made changes to our internal processes in advance of severe weather.

- Our emergency dispatch operators are backed up with additional call-takers so we can be ready to respond and deploy crews.
- Backup radio communications are ready in case phone lines are down, and alternate dispatch and central control locations are set up in the case of power outages.
- Our operations team meets daily – including weekends – to ensure we are ready to respond.

To prevent and prepare for interruptions, our operations staff has readied our emergency response plan, and attends weekly meetings with the Office of Emergency Management, El Paso Electric and Texas Gas. We coordinate with our utility partners on a regular basis, sharing details about our workforce and operations to make sure everyone is informed, and we appreciate the investments they have made in their systems.

Our communications team proactively reminds everyone to Protect Your Pipes. We hope you have seen our [videos](#), messages and tips in the news or on social media, and they helped you prepare your home for the freezing temperatures. Although insulating your pipes is important, it's not a guarantee that your pipes won't burst in prolonged below freezing events. Take a moment to have emergency supplies on hand, and know how to shut off your water if there is a break. We will continue to share more tips throughout the year.

Although our water and wastewater systems fared well in this event, there is always room to improve. We discovered some weaknesses in our cold-weather defenses that we will be working on throughout the next few years. These include a need for additional instrumentation protection, fuel storage, delivery trucks and generators.

As essential workers, all of our employees are committed to working through severe weather like snow, rain or even excessive summer heat. With their dedication, along with the investments in our systems, El Pasoans were able to continue to enjoy reliable water and wastewater services during this recent freeze. If you see an essential EPWater employee, please thank them for working to serve our community – even in frigid temperatures.





On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water.
Contact Christina Montoya at [915.594.5596](tel:915.594.5596) or cmontoya@epwater.org with any comments or questions.

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