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The water main is exposed but the suspected culprit of the leak, the 30-inch force main, still lies unexposed. The 16-inch water line will have water stops placed on Wednesday to allow crews to continue digging down to the sewer line. The City suspects that the leak is coming from the force main but will not be certain until the line is exposed.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 6, 2017

CITY CREWS STILL WORKING IN AREA OF POSSIBLE SEWER LEAK

City proceeding with abundance of caution to preserve public health as work continues

MUSCATINE, Iowa – City of Muscatine crews were able excavate a little more in the area of a suspected sewer line leak Monday nearly a week after the leak was first discovered. Crews have attempted to excavate the area since Tuesday but have been delayed due to the sandy soil and the area filling up with water. That pooling subsided on Sunday but pumping was still producing water.

Crews were able to dig down far enough to reveal the water main and the two-inch tap in the area of the leak but still need to go another four feet to expose the bottom of the sewer line. Muscatine Power & Water (MPW) has requested that a water stop be put in to protect the tap and the bend in the 16-inch pipe.

“We are taking it very slow right now,” Jon Koch, director of the Water Pollution Control Plant, said. “We are proceeding with an abundance of caution to protect public health. We want to do everything we can to protect the water supply and avoid any possible contamination.”

Koch said that fortunately there is a new valve on two areas that need to be isolated before crews can resume digging. Unfortunately, an inflatable water stop also needs to be installed and that cannot be done until Wednesday morning.

“There is a limited number of service providers for this and they cannot install the stop until Wednesday morning,” Koch said.

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Preventing the water lines from breaking and mixing with wastewater in the excavated area is behind the delay in finding and repairing the leak.

“We believe that this is the safest course to ensure the integrity of the drinking water supply,” Koch said.

City crews continue to pump the area that has a lot of sand and has retained a lot of water. Once the inflatable water stop is in place, crews can proceed with the excavation of the area. It is hoped that they will be able to find the leak by the end of the week and repairs can begin. Water service will not be interrupted with the use of the water stop as the other water lines in the area will be able to accommodate the increased work load.

MPW plans to replace the two-inch line, which feeds the Western Mall, during this process. Water for the Western Mall will be redirected from other areas during the replacement process.

The leak was discovered by MPW on Oct. 30 and an excavation of the area began last Wednesday (Nov. 1). However, due to the amount of water filling the excavated area it was decided to turn off the Papoose Lift Station and allow the 30-inch force main to empty. That process has taken five days before the pooling stopped. City crews began using sand point wells to drain the excavated area Thursday. These wells took the water out of the sand and allowed that water to be put into the sanitary sewer line heading to the Water Pollution Control Plant.

The intersection of Day, Birch, and Nebraska Streets remains closed.

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The Papoose Lift Station was turned off Tuesday (Oct. 31) to allow the force main to drain. The wet well and Papoose Tunnel filled during this time and began discharging into the Mississippi River late Tuesday.

Papoose Tunnel discharges upstream from the old boat landing along the Muscatine Riverfront. Water quality immediately downstream of this discharge may not meet State standards for fishing and swimming and contact should be avoided. The old boat landing was closed by the City Wednesday until repairs are completed and the lift station turned on.

No health hazards are expected from this discharge due to the limited use of the river in the affected area at this time.

Koch added that the City is not discharging into Briar's Ditch or the Muscatine Slough at this time and do not anticipate needing to do so for the remainder of this repair. The public should avoid Briar's Ditch until there has been a rain sufficient to move water in the channel.

City staff continues to test the length of the discharge to identify how far reaching the wastewater contamination is.

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