

PLAINVIEW'S PIPING

■ **15% of homes** leaky; flooding, costly fixes result

■ **Water district** turns to expert behind Flint lead find

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY
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The Plainview Water District is investigating why copper pipes are springing pinhole leaks that have flooded basements, bathrooms and kitchens in homes throughout the system, which serves 34,000 people.

Nearly 15 percent of customers in the district have reported the leaks, which can cause thousands of dollars in damage and lead to lengthy and complicated repairs.

The cause is a mystery, though the district has suspicions, including changing water chemistry, improperly grounded electricity, aging hot water heaters and treatments installed at well sites to remove contaminants.

In the effort to understand what is happening, the water district has surveyed residents, inspected homes and mapped the pinhole leaks, which occur in pressurized supply pipes. They also brought in Marc A. Edwards, a Virginia Tech environmental and water resources engineering professor who uncovered problems in drinking water in Washington, D.C., where pipe corrosion led to potential lead exposure, and Flint, Michigan, where a change in water supply and insufficient treatment led to high levels of lead.

Now, without waiting to establish a clear cause of the leaks, the district has begun changing the chemistry of the water the system distributes in hopes of reversing whatever is corroding pipes.

"It's very rare for water to eat through a copper pipe," Edwards said in an interview. "We've looked at all of the known things that could go wrong and it doesn't fall into any of these categories."

Edwards said it could take years to find a cause, so he suggested starting with some possible fixes to stop the problem.

"Even though we don't know the cause, we could possibly find a solution," he said.



Wayne Weinstein's Plainview home has been plagued with pinhole leaks, starting with pipes attached to the hot water heater, background.

HOW TO SPOT A POTENTIAL LEAK

Corroding copper pipes will begin to turn green — like the Statue of Liberty — in places.

Leaks can be as small as a pinhole and can occur anywhere along the pipe.

Because the leaks generally occur in pressurized supply lines, even a small hole can produce a big leak.

During the probe, the district realized alkalinity levels had dropped and that might have been triggered by a granular ac-

tivated-carbon system that had been added to some wells to remove volatile organic chemicals. So the district began adding lime to the system to increase alkalinity, which helps neutralize corrosive acids, back to levels more common in the 1980s. It could take three to six months to see if that fixes the leaking, Edwards said.

"This is a complex issue with no immediate answer," said Marc Laykind, one of three district water commissioners. "Raising alkalinity is a positive direction."

Residents are hopeful a solution is reached soon. "They should have done it a long time ago," Marsha Elowsky said.

When she and husband Joe Elowsky returned from a trip to Europe in late 2016, they noticed a wet spot on their kitchen ceiling. Then the ceiling opened and flooded the kitchen. The culprit: a pinhole leak in pipes behind a toilet in an upstairs bathroom.

Costly replacement

The Elowskys had to replace the bathroom upstairs and essentially redo their kitchen with new floors, cabinets and other items. Four more leaks hit the basement. It took about six months and cost about \$35,000, mostly covered by their homeowner's insurance.

District officials said it wasn't uncommon to hear occasionally

about one or two pinhole leaks, but in late October 2016, numerous residents came to the water commissioners' board meeting with complaints.

"We feel for every one of these homeowners," said Commissioner Amanda Field, who ran for the water district board in 2016, spurred in part by the large number of leaks. "To have your home put into such disarray, it's a big deal."

It was Field who reached out to Edwards, who was then hired by the board to serve as a consultant, with a contract not to exceed \$7,500.

The district, which also covers parts of Old Bethpage, also sent surveys out to its 10,500

PUZZLER



Joe Elowsky inspects the furnace inside his and wife Marsha's Plainview home last week.

customers and, of more than 1,700 who responded, roughly 1,500 confirmed a pinhole leak. By September the district had done 131 home inspections.

Those inspections revealed that 70 percent of the leaks were in hot-water pipes, not cold. Seventy percent of pinholes were within 15 feet of hot-water heaters, and stray electrical current was documented in 60 percent of the leaks.

"There's no central condition that we can come up with. That's really the big challenge," said James Neri, vice president of water resources at H2M Water, a Melville engineering firm that works with the water district.

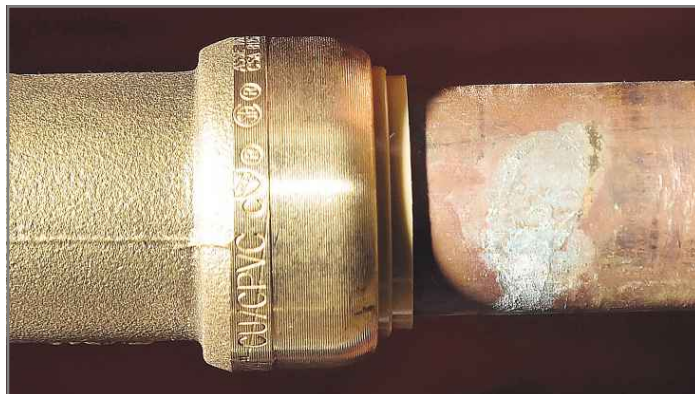
Isolated to homes

The problem also appears isolated to copper piping in homes, not the thicker copper piping used to distribute water throughout the district.

"None of the copper pipes in service lines had issues, but copper pipes in homes, yes," said Superintendent Stephen Moriarty, who joined the district in April.

It's hard to know if the problem of pinhole leaks in water systems is widespread elsewhere on Long Island because there is no annual survey of leaks.

Corroding pipes aren't considered a regulatory violation requiring reporting and home-



Rotted splotch on some copper piping in Wayne Weinstein's home.

owners are more likely to call plumbers than their water supplier when they have a leak, according to the American Water Works Association Journal.

Wayne Jazdzuk, owner of Abalene Plumbing & Heating in Syoset, said he has answered more pinhole calls in Plainview in the past year than anywhere else, though a few years ago Hicksville had some issues.

"A lot of people are having hardships with it in finished basements," Jazdzuk said. "You think you're finished and then we have to go back and open up walls and ceilings. There's a couple of homes we've been to four or five times."

Instead of replacing the failed piping with more copper,

Jazdzuk is using a polyethylene tubing that is corrosion-resistant. "It's a better way to go," he said.

Since last October, Wayne Weinstein has had 11 pinhole leaks in the basement of his Plainview home, mostly in hot-water copper pipes. He has welded some holes shut, replaced piping and installed watertight fittings to close the gaps.

Weinstein said he has probably spent 40 hours on repairs.

"It gets to be exhausting and it's time-consuming and the damage is extensive," he said.

He has replaced carpeting twice and removed furniture. Alarms that go off when water is detected now sit near his hot-water heater.

Kaepernick files claim of collusion

The Washington Post

Quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who remains unemployed after a 2016 season in which he began the movement of players protesting during the national anthem, has filed a grievance accusing NFL teams of improperly colluding to keep him out of the league, according to a person familiar with the case.

Kaepernick reportedly has retained an attorney to pursue the collusion claim and, according to the source, it will be Kaepernick's outside legal representation and not the NFL Players Association primarily in charge of preparing and presenting his grievance.

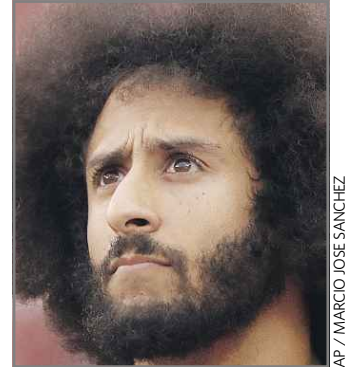
The collective bargaining agreement between the league and the players' union prohibits teams from conspiring to make decisions about signing a player. But the CBA also says the mere fact that a player is unsigned, and evidence about the player's qualifications to be on an NFL roster, do not constitute proof of collusion.

For that reason, such cases are difficult to prove, according to legal experts.

"There has to be some evidence of an agreement between multiple teams not to sign a player," said Gabriel Feldman, the director of the sports law program at Tulane University. "Disagreement over personnel decisions, as obvious as it may seem to someone looking at this, does not provide evidence of collusion."

Kaepernick opted out of his contract with the San Francisco 49ers following last season, making him a free agent eligible to sign with any team. The 49ers have said they would have released Kaepernick rather than retaining him under the terms of that deal. He has remained out of work. The Seattle Seahawks and Baltimore Ravens considered signing Kaepernick but decided against doing so.

More recently, the Tennessee Titans signed Brandon



Colin Kaepernick has not had a team since the 2016 season.

Weeden to provide depth when their starting quarterback, Marcus Mariota, was hurt. That seemed particularly inflammatory to Kaepernick supporters who cited Kaepernick's superior career accomplishments. Kaepernick has led the 49ers to a Super Bowl and two NFC championship games and he threw 16 touchdown passes with four interceptions for them last season.

Kaepernick refused to stand for the national anthem before games last season to protest, he said, racial inequality and police mistreatment of African-Americans. Those protests were taken up by other players and the controversy over them has been amplified this season even with Kaepernick out of the league.

President Donald Trump called on NFL owners to "fire" players who protested during the anthem. Vice President Mike Pence walked out of a game last week in Indianapolis, citing players' protests. Trump indicated that he had orchestrated that plan.

Under pressure from the White House, NFL owners are scheduled to meet Tuesday and Wednesday in New York and might seek the NFLPA's support of a measure for players to stand for the anthem, according to multiple people familiar with the sport's inner workings, while also pledging league support for players' community activism efforts.

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AP / MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ