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FAS teams step up to handle SSW flooding

Fortunately, flooding in UT Austin buildings is rare except in extreme weather events. But when a mechanical failure causes indoor flooding, it's "all hands on deck." Crews from Utilities and Energy Management (UEM), Facilities Services, and Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) respond to prevent and mitigate as much disruption to building occupants and property damage as possible.

When the Facilities Service Center (FSC) began receiving calls on Monday, July 29, shortly after 4 p.m. that several inches of water were entering Document Solutions' space in the School of Social Work building (SSW), FSC immediately reached out to Facilities Services' Zone 3 and Utilities and Energy Management's (UEM's) Mechanical Distribution (MD) division. By 5:30, the flow of water was shut off, and Zone 3 installed pumps to remove as much water as possible from the work area.

Once it was determined that the cause of the flooding was a water main break under a window well in the concrete, UEM and Zone 3 staff began digging to find the broken line. Having done what they could in their supporting role, Zone 3 left the site at 11:00 p.m., and the UEM crew continued digging until 2 a.m., but had still not found the line. At that point, they decided to stop, too, although two MD staff stayed overnight so that they could begin work onsite at their normal start time of 6:30 a.m.



In addition to addressing the leak, it was also important to dry out and clean the floors in Document Solutions and a nearby room. Monday evening, Zone 3 contacted Facilities Services' Custodial Services, whose staff that serve SSW used a floor pump, mops and a vacuum to reduce the amount of water. While the water was turned off, "my crew worked really hard to get all the area

cleaned up. They even had to go to TSC (Texas Swimming Center) to fill the mop buckets with [clean] water," explained Brian Babauta, a building services supervisor in Custodial Services.

Environmental Health and Safety went into action as well when the line broke, notifying building personnel to post "Do Not Drink the Water" signs at all faucets, drinking fountains and kitchens in the building.

The next day, UEM brought in a contractor to assist in locating the line so as to avoid further delays in resolving the problem. After the contractor marked the location of

the pipe, the MD Shop crew finished uncovering the line in the landscape, but because the water didn't shoot up, they decided to break the concrete in the window well floor – and the water did shoot up when this was done. A 12- to 14-inch crack in the cast iron pipe was discovered, “most likely caused by age, pressure or a combination of factors. The line was dated 1933,” said Tommy Parker, MD supervisor.

The UEM crew did a temporary fix so that water to SSW could be turned back on, only to discover another leak next to the first one. They shut the water off again and proceeded to make the necessary permanent repairs, which took a crew of six men about seven hours to complete. The water was turned on around 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, and Custodial Services performed final indoor floor cleaning.

Throughout these efforts, the Facilities Service Center assisted with coordination and keeping senior leadership informed.

With the water turned off from Monday evening into Tuesday night, the most urgent issue was the impact on the San Jacinto Child Development Center (CDC). Program Director Hara Cootes was able to notify parents ahead of time that the center would be closed on Tuesday. But the center could not reopen until the outdoor line was flushed by UEM, the indoor lines were flushed by Zone 3 and EHS tested the water at three locations in SSW and received notice from Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) that the water was safe for drinking and washing. Once DSHS gave word that all the water samples passed, EHS notified building personnel to remove the “Do Not Drink the Water” signs. The Child Development Center was able to reopen on Wednesday.

While several factors came into play that could have easily disrupted the coordination and repairs during this two-day effort, Dwight Moore, assistant plant maintenance supervisor for MD, and Tommy Parker noted that everyone worked extremely well together, and each crew member was on task the entire time. There was no complaining, and everyone stepped up.

Richard Beto, director of Document Solutions, expressed his appreciation for the efforts, acknowledging “It was a difficult job for a variety of reasons It was hot and obviously had a sense of urgency.”



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Facilities Service

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