

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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June 8, 2016

“Privately owned fire hydrants need to be checked”

The Norfolk City Council has recently approved an ordinance requiring that all privately owned water hydrants be inspected twice a year.

According to Dennis Watts, City of Norfolk Water and Sewer Director, the decision to do so was a safety issue.



Dennis Watts, City of Norfolk Water and Sewer Director, tests a privately owned hydrant in Norfolk.

“A few years ago when firefighters connected to a private fire hydrant at a major Norfolk fire, it was frozen as it hadn’t drained correctly that fall so they had to go to a different hydrant. Having a non-working hydrant during a fire can be a life and death situation. This ordinance provides that all fire hydrants, whether they’re on public or private property, will be checked twice a year to ensure that they operate correctly,” Watts said.

The National Fire Protection Association sets fire safety standards that include the inspection, testing, maintenance and repair of private fire hydrants.

According to the new City ordinance, property owners are responsible to keep records showing that the hydrants on their property have been tested and work properly. They can get a company to test the hydrant or they can contract with the City Water Division staff to do so at the cost of \$20 per hydrant for one to five hydrants or \$15 per hydrant to test five or more hydrants.

Watts said the hydrants need to be tested in the spring to make sure they work after winter has passed and operate freely and have good pressure and then again in the fall to ensure that they have drained properly so the water doesn’t freeze up in the hydrant mechanism.

If a hydrant doesn’t operate correctly, the owner will be notified and given an estimate of the costs of materials and labor to repair it.

“There are about 100 private hydrants at 40 businesses and organizations around Norfolk. Most of these hydrants will test okay but some may need an adjustment as simple as lubrication,” Watts said, “The Water Division will be setting up appointments with property owners to discuss the testing and inspection of their fire hydrants. We encourage them to call 402-844-2210 to set up a date and time.”