



# St. Regis Mohawk Tribe

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Saint Regis Mohawk Workers Repair Water Line Break** *Water Service Restored*

**Akwesasne Territory** -- On Wednesday, January 4, 2012, the Saint Regis Mohawk Police notified Water Plant operators at 11:15 pm reporting loss of water pressure in the east end of Akwesasne. Tracy Billhardt went to the water plant and noticed water tower levels had significantly decreased, indicating a break. Tracy discovered a significant leak in front of the HAVFD Fire Station No 1 at 11:45 pm. By 12:10 am Thursday January 5, 2012, Water and Construction managers and staff were notified and arrived on the site of the leak by 1:30 am to begin repairs. Lazore Construction Company also responded to the call and was on site along with tribal crew of workers.

To isolate the leak, workers attempted to shut down gate valves near Cook Road, the IGA and the four corners in Hogansburg. If the leak could have been isolated, it would have been possible to supply water to every other area of the reserve while repair work was underway. However, the valve at the southwest corner in Hogansburg was inoperable. A snow plow possibly hit it last winter. Workers could not locate the valve across from Number 9 Fuels/Cook Road. At this time the water level in the tower was four to six feet. Normal operating level is between 27 to 32 feet.

At 4:14 am Water Plant Manager Shawn Martin and Water Plant Operators Tracy Billhardt and Moochie Bero decided to shut down the water tower before the tank completely drained. If they had not shut down the water tower, the distribution lines would have filled with air. Once water was reintroduced into the system the air would have blown valves, saddles and hydrants, causing a massive shut-down to the entire system. This would have taken weeks to repair.

Meanwhile, the Tribe's construction crew and Barry Herne continued their search for the gate valve across from Number 9/Cook Road. At approximately 8:30 am they discovered that the gate valve was buried under the driveway to the reclamation site. Unfortunately, locating and closing nearby gate valves took the workers hours to complete.

Workers found two leaks. The primary leak was at the valve serving the nearest hydrant on the ten inch water main. The secondary leak was at the fire station's four inch service line connection. The two sites are within 20 feet of each other. Corroded nuts and bolts caused two gate valves to blow apart on the ten inch main on 37 and on the four inch gate valve supplying the fire station.

The pressure in the water line forced all water from the tower and water plant to the leak at the fire station site. Because of this, workers were not able to fully close the gate valves leading to the leak until the tower and all residential supply was shut down. Excavation started at approximately 8:00 am on Friday January 5 to discover source of leak.

Aside from difficulty locating gate valves, the biggest obstacle was availability of parts, particularly 10” Hymax mechanical couplers. Workers called MCA and suppliers in Cornwall, Malone and Massena before one was located. The Construction Department has four Hymax couplers on order.

Repairs were completed around 3:30 pm on Thursday January 5. During the repair, water was routed to the water tower to restore it to acceptable levels. By 3:30 pm the tower had reached 22 feet. Workers slowly opened gate valves and turned on the water system between 3:30 and 4:00 pm. Hydrants at the end lines were flushed to help clear stagnant water and air pockets.

As standard procedure a “boil water advisory” was issued until from water sample testing could be completed. Samples were delivered to Life Science Labs in Waddington at 9:00am on Friday. The lab did an emergency test and provided results on Saturday at 9:00 am. Fortunately, all results were negative and the advisory was lifted. Shawn Martin immediately reported results to the casino, the Bingo Palace and to radio stations CKON, WMSA and WPTZ. As expected, residents experienced cloudiness in their water due to air bubbles.

Nuts and bolts commonly corrode in the soil types found in the North Country. Only stainless steel bolts with anodes (to draw off the corrosion) will prevent this from recurring. In the future, workers will upgrade all hydrants and valves in the system and using only stainless steel bolts on water line jobs. Water Plant and Construction Managers are in contact with the New York Department of Transportation to repair the gate valve in Hogansburg to eliminate possibility of future damage.

Individuals undertaking construction projects are asked to contact the Construction Department at 358-4205 in order to avoid water lines, water line valves and sewer lines. This will avoid disruptions in service and help workers to be able to make necessary repairs more quickly and efficiently.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government  
of the Saint Regis Mohawk People