

Gloucester Times

November 24, 2010

Letter: Roots of water main breaks run deeper than aging pipes

To the editor:

Gloucester's recent water main breaks are a painful reminder of our crumbling infrastructure ("Twin breaks spark DPW water repairs," Times, Nov. 19), which is a widespread issue.

The American Society of Civil Engineers recently gave our nation a "D-minus" grade for the state of our roads and critical water/wastewater infrastructure.

But the problem isn't just aging systems — in the case of water main breaks, most relate to the use of corrosion-prone piping materials.

More durable, cost-effective and sustainable technologies exist, but they often don't get a seat at the bidding table because of restrictive and outdated procurement rules.

That's an insult to taxpayers who suffer an average of 700 water main breaks a day in North America. A 2002 congressional study underlined that corrosion costs U.S. water and wastewater systems upwards of \$50 billion annually.

Policymakers can do many things to give taxpayers better value for water infrastructure, such as revisiting costly labor requirements on projects and conducting more "technical audits" to identify inefficiencies.

A great place to start, however, is with an open bidding process that ensures all materials and techniques get the consideration they deserve.

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