

Frigid temperatures, power outages lead to water problems

February 18 2021, by Adrian Sainz and Jake Bleiberg



City of Richardson workers prepare to work on a water main pipe that burst due to extreme cold in a neighborhood Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Richardson, Texas. Water service providers in Tennessee, Oklahoma, Texas and other states hit hard by frigid winter storms and mounting power outages are asking residents to restrict usage as reports of water main breaks, low pressure and busted pipes emerge. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

About 7 million people in Texas—a quarter of the nation's second-most populous state—were told to boil their water or stop using it entirely as homeowners, hospitals, and businesses grappled with broken water mains and burst pipes, many in areas unaccustomed to dealing with sustained frigid temperatures.

Winter storms during the past week in the Midwest, Texas and the South forced water service providers to scramble to manage flows as sub-freezing temperatures presented serious problems.

The Texas city of Kyle, south of Austin, asked residents Wednesday to suspend [water usage](#) until further notice because of a shortage.

"Water should only be used to sustain life at this point," the city of 45,000 said in an advisory. "We are close to running out of water supply in Kyle."

In Memphis, Tennessee, the power and water company asked residents to reduce their water usage through Friday.

Memphis, Light, Gas & Water said in a news release that it is experiencing reduced pressure across its distribution system due to freezing temperatures this week.

The utility also said it is seeing reduced reservoir levels at pumping stations and several [water mains](#) have burst. MLG&W has asked customers to refrain from leaving the water running while rinsing dishes, take short showers and hold off on washing clothes until Friday. Officials also asked customers to save water by letting faucets drip, instead of streaming water, to prevent pipes from freezing over.



Nathan Bercy, with the City of Richardson water department, begins to open access to make repairs to a water main break due to extreme cold Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, in Richardson, Texas. Water service providers in Tennessee, Oklahoma, Texas and other states hit hard by frigid winter storms and mounting power outages are asking residents to restrict usage as reports of water main breaks, low pressure and busted pipes emerge. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

Oklahoma City officials said on Twitter that [power outages](#) and extremely low temperatures caused water service interruption and low pressure for customers. Crews helped turn off water for thousands of customers who had their private water lines break.

"Leave your cabinet doors open to allow warm air to circulate," the city said in a tweet. "Do not try to use open flames or boiling water to thaw

pipes."

Three hospitals in Shreveport, Louisiana, lost water because of the storm, KSLA-TV reported. City fire trucks delivered water and officials were getting bottled water for patients and staff.

In the southwest Louisiana city of Lake Charles, hospitals were faced with the possibility they might have to transfer patients to other areas because of low water pressure that followed a power outage, Mayor Nic Hunter said.



Father John Szatkowski of St. Paul The Apostle Church sweeps water from a broken water line out of his church in Richardson, Texas, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Father Szatkowski and his staff found the flooding as they prepared for Ash Wednesday services. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)

The weather also caused major disruptions to water systems in the Texas cities of Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Galveston and Corpus Christi.

In Austin, residents were told Wednesday night to boil their water after the city's largest treatment plant lost power. Meanwhile, the city's fire department said it has received hundreds of broken water pipe calls since Monday. On Tuesday alone, the department fielded 685 calls about busted pipes.

In Houston, also, residents were told to boil their water—if they had power to do so—because of a major drop in water pressure linked to the weather. Austin Water told residents in the southwest section of the city to boil water before using it for drinking or cooking.

Leaders in Austin and the Houston area asked residents to stop dripping water from their faucets because of a drop in water pressure.



Ambulances line up outside of St. David's South Austin Medical Center in preparation to transport patients in Austin, Texas, on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Earlier in the day, hospital officials said some patients at the facility would be moved to other hospitals in the area after the building began losing heat due to low water pressure. (Bronte Wittpenn/Austin American-Statesman via AP)

Nueces Brewing Co. in Corpus Christi offered water to those experiencing shortages. Tap room manager Gwen Ponder said they plan to give out 2,000 gallons of filtered water originally intended for beer brewing.

"We are happy to do it," Ponder said. "These are strange times."

In Abilene, Texas, firefighters were hampered by low water pressure as

they tried to extinguish a house fire, the Abilene Reporter News reported.

"They had to watch that house burn," City Manager Robert Hanna said at a news conference.

In Dallas, Gerry Gross tried in vain to reach the cut-off valve outside his home after a pipe burst and sent water pouring through the wall of his utility room. Dressed in a knit sweater and sweatpants tucked into his rubber boots, Gross, 60, struggled to use a wrench to pry open a metal cover in the sidewalk outside his home that covers the valve.

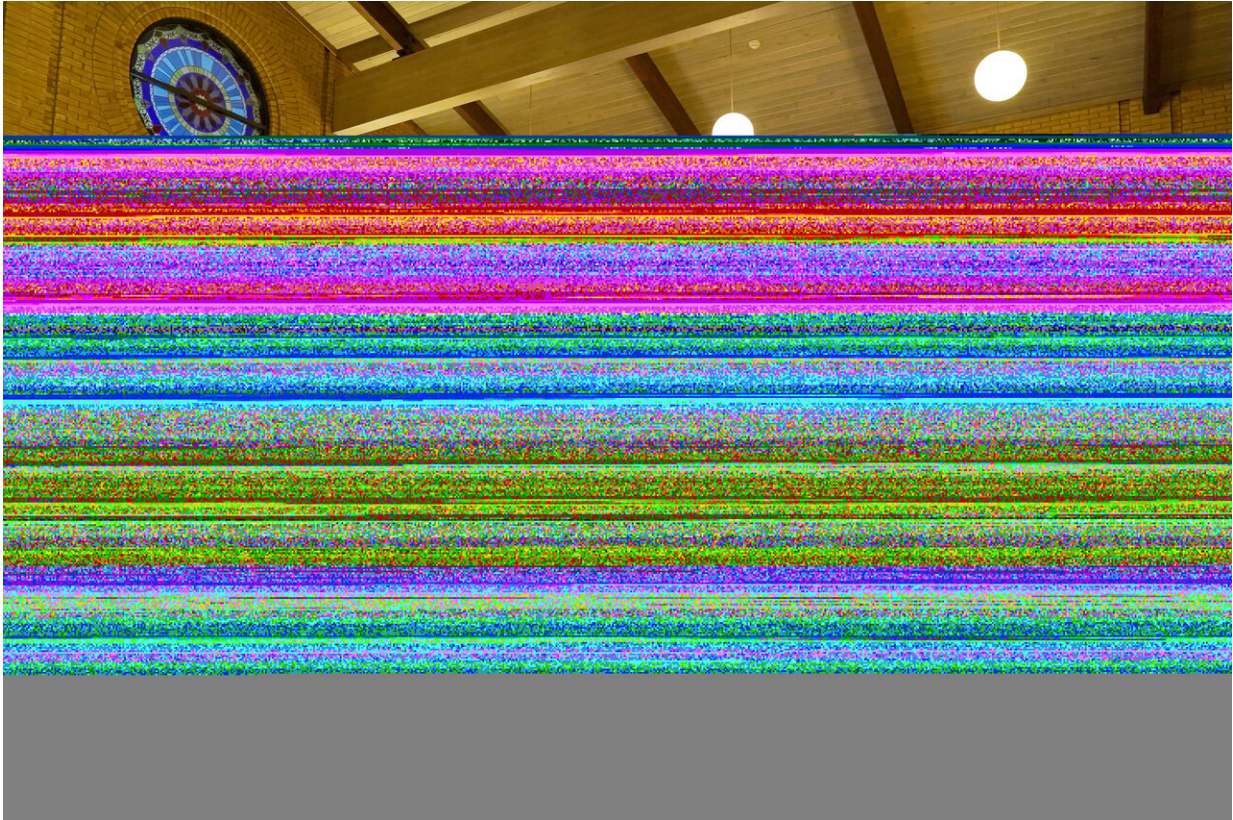


Father John Szatkowski of St. Paul The Apostle Church stands looking at his flooded atrium caused by a broken water line in Richardson, Texas, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Father Szatkowski and his staff discovered the flooding as they

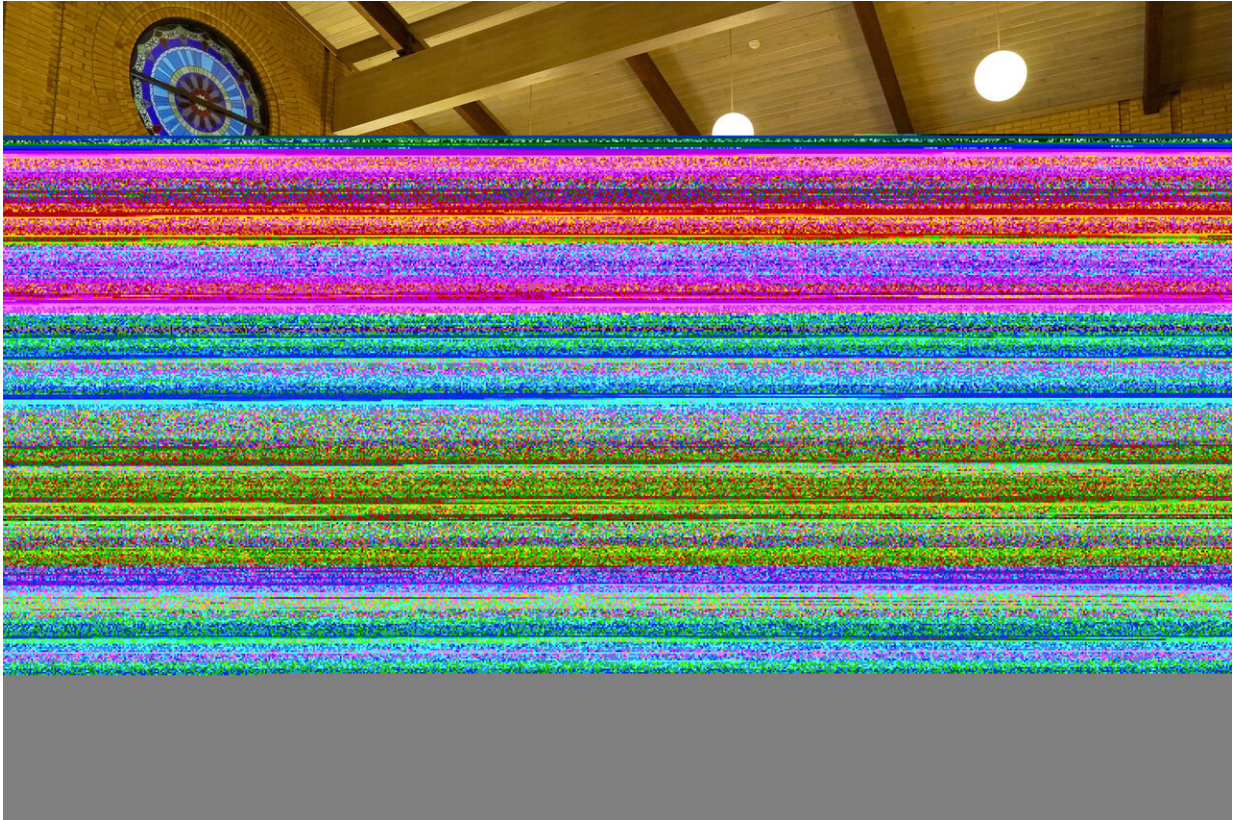
prepared for Ash Wednesday services. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)



Father John Szatkowski, front, of St. Paul The Apostle Church and Deacon Bob Bonomi, left, walk through the flooded atrium of their church in Richardson, Texas, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Father Szatkowski and his staff found the flooding from a broken water line as they prepared for Ash Wednesday services. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)



Father John Szatkowski, left at door, of St. Paul The Apostle Church makes a phone call as he stands looking at the flooded atrium of his church in Richardson, Texas, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Father Szatkowski and his staff discovered the flooding, from a broken water line, as they prepared for Ash Wednesday services. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)



A patient at St. David's South Austin Medical Center is prepared for transport in Austin, Texas, on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Earlier in the day, hospital officials said some patients at the facility would be moved over to other hospitals in the area after the building began losing heat due to low water pressure. (Bronte Wittpenn/Austin American-Statesman via AP)



Father John Szatkowski, left, of St. Paul The Apostle Church and Deacon Bob Bonomi, right, sweep water out of their church in Richardson, Texas, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021. Father Szatkowski and his staff found the flooding, from a broken water line, as they prepared for Ash Wednesday services. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)

Gross said he had been without power for 36 hours and the temperature inside his home had fallen into the 30s when the pipe burst. He got power back Wednesday but he has been unable to get a plumber to come to fix the leak.

Gross wrapped the pipe in duct tape to try to dam the flow into the room that holds his washer and dryer, but it continued to seep through.

"If I call the [city](#), they'll just shut off the [water](#) completely and who knows when I'll get it back," he said. "It's kind of the Wild West out here."

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