

# Ratepayers funding water lost and unaccounted for

BY DEBBIE KOLLARS

Over 982 million gallons of water from Lincoln's water system was lost and unaccounted for last year due to meter inaccuracies, leaks and thieves.

The cost of the unaccounted for water, estimated to be worth \$350,000, is absorbed by ratepayers, Rich Robinson, chief engineer of the city's water works, said.

There are several factors which contribute to water being lost or unaccounted for, he said. The most significant loss in Lincoln is due to metering inaccuracies.

When a water meter is not functioning properly, it usually registers a lower reading than what is actually used. The ratepayer may pay a lower price, but that water that has been used and not paid for becomes lost or unaccounted for water, he said.

"Unaccounted for water is one of our costs," Robinson said. "It has to be figured into our expenses, so the general ratepayer eventually pays for it."

Some of the lost water leaks out of the 900 miles of pipe in Lincoln's water system. There are about 80 large leaks a year, Robinson said.

Generally the leaking water surfaces and is reported by the public. Leaks under concrete or frozen ground in winter are more difficult to detect because they may surface far away from the actual leak.

Pete Haase, assistant superintendent of construction for the city's water works, said some water is lost by unauthorized persons tapping into a fire hydrant to fill their water needs.

He said some contractors use water from the hydrants without a hydrant meter on construction jobs. They may be filling tank trucks or using the water to help pack soil around foundations.

"We try to monitor them as close as we can, and often the public will report a contractor or builder using a hydrant without a permit," Haase said. "But it happens more often than we'd like, and we can't catch them all."

Haase added that some contractors who pay for water by the load instead of using meters don't always report every load they use.

Robinson said there was a case just last week in which an earth moving contractor was turned over to the police for using water from a hydrant without a permit.

Such unauthorized users "get off fairly easily," Robinson said.

A smaller amount of water is lost in dousing fires. The amount of water used by the Fire Department in putting out fires is hard to determine and can only be estimated, Haase said.

Public drinking fountains around the city also contribute slightly to the total of unaccounted for water.

Robinson said the American Water Works Association has set a standard whereby utilities that have a water loss and unaccounted for of 15 percent or less are considered to be well-run utilities.

A recent report showed that 7.76 percent of the 12.7 billion gallons of water distributed by Lincoln's water system last year was lost and unaccounted for.

With a comparatively low figure like that, Robinson said he is "not too worried" about the city's water loss.

He attributed the relatively low water loss to Lincoln's "good meter program" and "a good, tight system of pipes."

About six years ago, a new meter program was begun whereby all old mechanical meters were to be replaced by new magnetically operated meters. Robinson said 32,000 of the more accurate new outside meters have been installed. In a concentrated program over the next two years, the remaining 16,000 old meters are expected to be replaced.

Another major reason Lincoln's percentage of unaccounted for water is low is its good water pipe system.

"We have newer pipes than a lot of cities. It is a good system made up of good standardized materials. Therefore, we have fewer leaks than many cities," Robinson said.



staff photo by Bill Graf

Rock Island Railroad Station may become Union Bank's fourth outlet.

## Bank buys Rock Island Depot

BY LISA HOLMES

Union Bank has acquired the old Rock Island Railroad Depot at 1944 O St. for full service drive-in banking, according to Jay Dunlap, president of the Bank. In a letter sent to bank customers in May, Dunlap stated that the old depot was purchased six months ago in anticipation of the change in Nebraska's law on the number of bank facilities. Prior to June 1, the banking law limited the banks to three facilities. The change in the law would allow the bank to have four facilities including the main bank. Union Bank still has to apply to the Banking Department for authority to use the depot as a full service bank. According to Barry Lake, assistant director and legal counsel for the banking department, it takes three to five months for the bank's application to be decided on. The bank must first submit an application form to

have another facility. The application is then reviewed and made public for two months prior to a public hearing. Prior to the hearing, the notice runs in the paper three days. The hearing is then held, and the public may attend to voice their opinions. The board then makes a decision. The biggest factor the bank must show is the need for a bank in that area of the community, said Lake. The bank also must show the convenience, the location, and the building plans for the future bank. All formal protests need to be filed with the Banking Department.

The bank's fourth facility should open around September.

Union Bank has already started remodeling and redecorating the depot. The bank is trying to retain the character of the old depot and still be efficient for business use. Dunlap said he thinks it is important to maintain the beauty and historical value of Lincoln's landmarks.

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