

Collapse of Atlanta water system continues for third day

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The collapse of the water infrastructure in Atlanta, Georgia, that began on Friday and left a large section of the city without any water expanded on Sunday with two more ruptures being investigated by water department officials.

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported Sunday that the water department warned residents and businesses near Euclid and North Avenues northeast of downtown and near 1190 Atlantic Drive NW north of downtown. It said that they will likely “experience the kinds of disruptions that have plagued Atlanta since the first water main break was discovered Friday.”

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens declared a state of emergency in the city at a press conference on Saturday night after the massive disruption of water service resulted in a boil water advisory from the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management. Dickens said the city was “working around the clock to bring us safe drinking water in the city of Atlanta.”

The water main collapse that shut down water service in all of downtown Atlanta began after corroded 48-inch and 36-inch pipes burst sometime on Friday at an intersection of three primary water lines in the city. The City of Atlanta released a map showing a large area across the city that has been impacted by the collapse.

Hours went by before the city made any announcements about what was happening or when the water would be restored. The city’s Water Service Interruptions Map identifies the locations where the breaks occurred and simply says, “Crews are investigating a potential water main break ...” with no further information.

The water main failure impacted Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Fulton County and Atlanta government facilities and the Mercedes-Benz

Stadium and the State Farm Arena. High-rise apartment buildings were also left with no water pressure.

Businesses were forced to close their doors or reduce their services on what would have been a busy Saturday in the city. Major events, including concerts and sporting events, were canceled, and hotel guests were forced to use bottled water in their rooms or check out early.

Business owner Emily Chan told *Rough Draft Atlanta*, “As a business with a City of Atlanta Watershed account, we have received ZERO emails, texts, or communications. We have only received communication via social media posts that people have shared.”

Emory University Hospital Midtown told news media on Saturday that it was forced to move patients and divert ambulances due to the crisis. A *Journal Constitution* report said, “The situation grew so serious by Saturday afternoon, that the hospital—which has about 500 patients hospitalized—doesn’t even have enough water pressure to flush toilets and is forced to rely on bottled water for all water needs.”

Dr. Adam Webb, chief operating officer of Emory Midtown, said, “Health care is challenging enough to care for patients in a hospital and when you add to that, not having water, not being able to flush toilets and other things. Things that are an annoyance at home are really a true challenge and make the job that much more complex.”

Ten patients who need dialysis—a process that depends on water pressure—have been transferred to other Emory hospitals for treatment.

City residents were outraged at the failure of the system and the lack of information coming from the city about the crisis. Posts by residents on the Atlanta Department of Watershed Management page exposed

both the government's lack of response and the negligence behind the collapse.

Kelly Hughes posted, "This is what happens when you fail to maintain the infrastructure and keep adding new users to an existing system. Increasing water pressure to try and keep up with new buildings was a sure fire way to start causing problems ... we've been complaining for YEARS about this issue only to be ignored by the city Gov't."

Responding to the appalling response to the crisis by the city, Jessica James commented on Sunday, "How are we expecting families still without water to be able to flush their toilets, cook, and stay hydrated with a single case of water? Are we providing flushing water in addition to the case of drinking water? I am grateful my water is back on, but there are residents [who] have been without running water since Friday morning and continue to not having running water. Clean drinking water is important but not the only function of indoor plumbing!"

Katie Robertson added, "What is the plan for these 80-year-old pipes? They only last 53 years! Why are they not replaced and maintained? You are wasting water and money on these breaks. Roll up your sleeves and get to work on a solution for the long run not a band-aid."

The failure of the water system in Atlanta is the latest in a growing series of events across the US that expose the decrepit condition of the infrastructure and refusal of the ruling political establishment and corporate elite to do anything about it. It follows the collapse of the water system in Jackson, Mississippi, after storm-related flooding, and the crisis in Flint, Michigan, in which thousands of adults and children were poisoned by lead in the water.

Essential services such as water and electricity are failing at an increasing rate due to the lack of resources made available to upgrade the systems which are in some cases a century old or older. For the ruling class, committing time and money to modernize these systems is a diversion of resources from the accumulation of personal wealth and vast fortunes. Meanwhile, any work that will be done to repair the systems will be paid for by the public in the form of service rate and tax increases. It will not come out of the pockets of the rich.

In the case of Atlanta, the original water

infrastructure dates to 1875 when the city had 22,000 people. The 36-inch water mains were first installed in 1907, and the 48-inch mains were built in 1924. According to a report published in 2018 on Atlanta's aging water infrastructure, "the city's water mains were renewed with a cement liner in the 1950s," but they have "far exceeded their design life."

Despite these well-known facts, little has been done to address the problem. In 2018, the city announced a paltry \$300 million Water Supply Program to upgrade the city's water infrastructure. So far, the only project worked on is a multi-year five-mile, 10-foot diameter conveyance line, and the conversion of an abandoned quarry into a reservoir.

As the water system has continued to crumble over decades, Atlanta has become a destination for the financial elite. Atlanta is among a handful of US cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas, where billionaires live.

There are 13 billionaires living in Atlanta, including Jim Kennedy (net worth \$8.2 billion), inheritor of Cox Communications; Dan and Bubba Cathy of Chick-fil-A (combined net worth \$8.3 billion); and Arthur Blank (net worth \$7 billion), co-founder of Home Depot and owner of the NFL Atlanta Falcons. Meanwhile, Atlanta also has some of the nations wealthiest neighborhoods, such as Tuxedo Park, where median home values are \$3.7 million.

The collapse of the water system is part of the aging infrastructure throughout the US. According to statistics in a 2023 study from Utah State University, 260,000 water main breaks in the US and Canada cost \$2.6 billion each year. The study said that 33 percent of US and Canadian water mains are more than 50 years old.



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