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Past 7 Days

•Advanced search tips

SERVICES

Subscriber Services

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NEWS

Westchester

Rockland

Putnam

New York

Newswatch: Iraq

Crime/Public Safety

Education

Environment

Gov't&Politics

Health

Religion

Transportation

Obituaries

Weekly Publications

SHOPPING

Shopping

Coupons

Local Stores

PHOTOS

Daily gallery

Local sports

Special galleries

Order reprints

SPORTS

NY report

Varsity Central:

HS Sports

Outdoors

All-Stars

• Rockland

• West.-Putnam

Columnists

• Rick Carpinello

• Jane McManus

• Ian O'Connor

• Glenn Sapir

60 seconds

Behind the scenes

National

Suburban Golf

BUSINESS

Business News

Markets

Local stocks

Real estate

Technology

David Schupp

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Mishaps raise safety concerns

By MARCELA ROJAS

THE JOURNAL NEWS

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BREWSTER — The village's \$38.2 million sewer and water improvement project has had a string of mishaps lately that have some residents and officials fed up and concerned with public safety.

On Oak Street last week, a dump truck slipped into a trench and fell on its side, spilling between 10 and 30 gallons of diesel fuel and breaking a water pipe. On June 10, an excavator struck a 1-inch gas line on Main Street near Oak Street, causing the evacuation of nine buildings. Two days before that incident, workers struck a water main, leaving residents on Main and Oak streets without water for five to six hours.

On April 6, workers were installing sewer lines on North Main Street when the trench suddenly collapsed. A falling rock broke a 1-inch gas line, forcing the evacuation of at least 20 homes and businesses.

"The bottom line is poor planning and no policing of the workers," said Paul Cummings, a resident who lives at Oak and Main streets. "It really gets people heated."

Cummings said he has had his own issues with the project, having to deal with a 6-foot-deep trench dug in front of his home that prevented his wife and newborn baby from being able to leave. Workers, he said, spray-painted markings a foot away from their car, rather than asking them to move the vehicle.

"It's been ridiculous," said Cummings' wife, Kathleen Cummings. "It's been nothing but a nightmare."

But while the project has been marred by traffic congestion, personal frustrations notwithstanding, what is now of concern to officials is ensuring that the project be completed without any more incidents. The massive undertaking, which began last summer, had been relatively problem-free until the spring's string of snafus.

At Wednesday night's village board meeting, trustees discussed the recent troubles and what, if anything, they could do to prevent more accidents. Village Engineer John Folchetti said he would send a memo to the project's general contractor, LAWS Construction of Pleasantville, to review its safety plans.

"It absolutely bears scrutiny so we don't get a repeat," Folchetti said. "We are fortunate there have been no injuries or major damage. But it's a wake-up call for everyone on the job to be more conscientious."

LAWS Construction officials did not return multiple telephone calls last week.

Folchetti explained the circumstances surrounding each of the accidents, some of which could have been avoided, he said, and others the result of plain bad luck. The dump-truck incident, he said, is still under

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Life&Style
 Antiques
 Day in the Life
 Calendar
 Travel
 Intown
 Celebrations
 The Bridal Book

investigation, but could have been a situation in which the truck was parked too close to the trench. Officials are looking into establishing criteria on how many feet a truck should be from a work site. On the other hand, the rock falling onto the gas pipe was an unavoidable occurrence, he said.

The village has not borne any cost relating to the mishaps, Folchetti added.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dining
 For kids
 Games
 Movies
 Music
 Theater
 THE LINE

The June 10 situation, in which the excavator's claws burst a gas pipe, was the result of workers' believing the line was about 2 feet underground, a standard practice, when really it was 6 inches below the surface, Folchetti said. In that case, New York State Electric and Gas accepted blame for the rupture at the site, he said.

NYSEG officials would not answer questions about the incident but issued a statement via fax, disputing that they were at fault in any of the cases.

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"There have been three recent incidents where the contractor working on the Village of Brewster sewer project has affected NYSEG energy delivery facilities," said NYSEG spokesman Clay Ellis. "In all cases, the facilities were properly marked and the contractor knew the specific locations of the facilities."

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Editorials
 Letters
 Matt Davies
 • The Pulitzer Prize
 Community Views
 Columnists
 • Bob Baird
 • Arthur Gunther
 • Laurie Nikolski
 • Phil Reisman

Village Public Works Superintendent Daniel Crawford said he has been on the scene for water pipe breaks. Since the project started, there have been at least a dozen service line breaks and only one water main break, he said. Though time-consuming, the disturbances were not unexpected.

"We'd be foolish not to expect problems with this kind of project," Crawford said.

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 Homes
 Cars
 Grocery Coupons
 Local Classifieds
 Local Stores

The \$38.2 million venture to build a new wastewater treatment plant and extend sewer lines throughout the village is being funded by New York City, which does not want to see runoff from faulty septic systems reaching its nearby reservoir. Along with the effort, a \$6 million bond is being used to finance upgrades and replacements to village water pipes, wells and pumps.

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 News Standards
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 Contact Us
 FAQ
 Subscribe
 How to advertise

At the moment, 57 percent of the sewer and 42 percent of the water work has been completed, Folchetti said. Work will continue on Main and Oak streets for the next month. The contractor's targeted completion date is December, though when the wastewater plant is finished in September 2006, workers will need to return to install short pipes, Folchetti said.

Though some have their grievances, others see the ultimate restoration of the village's infrastructure and are content.

"I'm not disturbed about these problems, because I know everyone is working as hard as they can," said Oak Street resident Terri Stockburger. "I'm pleased with the progress."



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