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Huge Water Loss Cause For Concern

THE LATEST municipal water audit reveals some troubling statistics for citizens who are concerned about preserving and reclaiming as much of this precious natural resource as possible.

Of the 13 billion gallons that moved through the Lubbock system in 2005, more than 783 million gallons drained out of broken pipes, was flushed to clean water mains or simply wasn't paid for, according to an audit prepared by the city for the state.

Most of the lost water - 563.7 million gallons - was delivered to customers who didn't pay for it, reported The A-J's Elliott Blackburn.

The report indicates that waivers or billing adjustments are typical reasons for such losses, but more than 439 million gallons had no documented explanation for why the city collected no money.

Another 124 million gallons slipped through large water meters used by bigger customers, according to the report.

For decades, we believed the Ogallala Aquifer was virtually limitless. We thought it be rapidly replenished by natural sources in perpetuity. But we were wrong.

Various studies indicate that aquifer water levels are dropping significantly. Some studies show there is much less groundwater than anticipated, that drilling deeper may provide lower quality water, and that aquifers overall are not being replenished as quickly as was once assumed.

Nevertheless, a city water official and a state analyst said the \$1 million-plus water loss, or roughly 6 percent of the water moving through the system, isn't bad for a city Lubbock's size.

Deputy City Manager Tom Adams, who supervises water utilities, said, "There's no question ... it's significant. But six percent (is) a good number to start with."

Comparing the 13 billion gallons produced to the 783 million gallons lost, Texas Water Development Board municipal water analyst Mark Mathis said, "They're good numbers."

Aging meters have trouble keeping track of how much water is passing through them, and could be responsible for much of the unbilled loss. Fortunately, the City Council approved a meter replacement program during the last budget session.

"Conservation of water should become a way of life," as a city news release correctly notes. We live on the edge of a desert. We are semi-arid. So we all need to be more conscious and careful of how we use water. Give some thought to how you are using water.

To report wasteful water use, contact the Water Hotline at 775-3952.