



TX-PWRT Water and Wastewater Deployment Team Helps the City of Laredo, Texas

by Bill Gutierrez

Steve Ash, TEEX Water and Wastewater (WWW) Program Training Coordinator, was en route to Eagle Pass, Texas, for a conference when he got the call to deploy as a member of the Texas A&M Public Works Response Team (TX-PWRT).

On February 18, the city of Laredo, Texas, went under a boil water notice due to low distribution pressure resulting from a line break, and a request for aid was sent to the State of Texas.



Juan Vasquez (right), TEEX WWW Instructor II, provides operational assistance to City of Laredo utilities professionals during water main repairs. (Photo by Steve Ash)

As part of the TX-PWRT deployment team, Chris Gable, ITSI Associate Program Director, traveled to the State Operations Center (SOC) in Austin, and Juan Vasquez, TEEX WWW instructor, traveled to Laredo to assist Steve. Juan and Steve provided operational support for the city and provided “eyes on the ground,” reporting to Chris at the SOC.

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Steve explained, “In the City of Laredo’s case, a boil water notice was issued because of these conditions: water pressure below 20 PSI, less than 0.5 milligrams of chlorine per liter (mg/L) and the possibility of coliform bacteria present.” Without water pressure, you cannot test for chlorine levels or bacteria.

From February 22 to March 2, Steve and Juan aided the City of Laredo Utilities Department workers in repairing the breaks and restoring water to affected areas. “Juan was indispensable,” Steve said. “He speaks Spanish and is a native of Laredo. He knows Mayor Pete Saenz and worked with the City Manager, Robert Eads, and Fire Chief, Guillermo Heard. In the end, it was great to see the coordinated efforts of the city, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM),” Steve added.



TDEM and other state partners, including the Texas Military Department, delivered more than 425,000 water bottles to city residents over the 13 days. The city of Laredo lifted the boil water notice on March 4. There is an ongoing effort to alleviate and repair water lines that are, in many cases, 50-60 years old.

If you would like to learn more or join the Texas A&M Public Works Response Team (TX-PWRT), please go to: <https://teex.org/txpwrt/>.



Note: Bill Gutierrez is a Communications Specialist II for TEEEX’s Infrastructure Training and Safety Institute.