

Opinion: First-class society would rebuild water system

By Bob Herbert, New York Times

If you had a leak in your roof or in the kitchen or basement, you'd probably think it a good idea to have it taken care of before matters got worse, and more expensive.

If only we had the same attitude when it comes to the vast and intricately linked water systems in the United States. Most of us take clean and readily available water for granted. But the truth is that the nation's water systems are in sorry shape – deteriorating even as the population grows and demand increases.

Aging and corroded pipes are bursting somewhere every couple of minutes. Dilapidated sewer systems are contaminating waterways and drinking water. Many local systems are so old and inadequate – in some cases, so utterly rotten – that they are overwhelmed by heavy rain.

As Charles Duhigg reported in the *Times* last March: “For decades, these systems – some built around the time of the Civil War – have been ignored by politicians and residents accustomed to paying almost nothing for water delivery and sewage removal. And so each year, hundreds of thousands of ruptures damage streets and homes and cause dangerous pollutants to seep into drinking water supplies.”

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