

Editorial: Time to replace old water pipes

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After decades of neglect, the bill is coming due – in the neighborhood of \$70 billion in water system fixes needed statewide, according to one estimate.

The \$7.5 billion water bond on the November ballot would provide some help. The bond includes four pots of money that could potentially be used to replace or repair old pipes: \$510 million in competitive grants for regional water management projects; \$260 million in grants for small community wastewater projects; \$260 million in grants and loans for small community safe drinking water projects; and \$100 million for water use efficiency and conservation.

This, however, is primarily the responsibility of local agencies, and the tab is largely going to be paid by their customers.

Even when aging pipes don't break, they exact a cost – the loss of treated water that leaks before making it to homes and businesses. Residents who are being urged, or ordered with the threat of fines, to conserve have a right to expect better.

No one knows exactly how much water is leaking because there's no requirement or standard reporting procedure for the state's 362 urban water suppliers. Based on audits voluntarily submitted to the state in 2010, the average loss was 10 percent, with a range of 5 percent to 30 percent.

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