

# Basic Maintenance

By [John Tenpenny](#) - October 15, 2024

If you've ever watched a home renovation show, then you've heard the line, "you'll spend the most money on the things you can't see."

Experts tell you that before you start on the fun stuff, make sure to take care of the essentials—such as the roof, mechanical and electrical systems, and don't forget the plumbing.

Basic maintenance is more important than an awesome kitchen.

If the state of Canada's plumbing—infrastructure that delivers the country's water—is any indication, it's obvious that governments haven't been watching much HGTV.

The break of a massive water main supplying 60 per cent of Calgary's drinking water in June, which forced consumption restrictions for a month in Alberta's largest city, placed the critical importance of a reliable supply front and centre.

Since then, the state of our water infrastructure and billions needed to inspect, maintain and replace it has come under scrutiny.

According to a study by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), millions of cubic metres of treated drinking water are being pumped into the ground every year across Ontario municipalities as a result of leaky and broken pipes and that it's estimated that leakage rates could be as high as 40 per cent.

"We've got really aging infrastructure in all of our cities that is 50 to 100 years old that needs replacement – and we put it off," Robert Haller, executive director of the Canadian Water & Wastewater Association, told The Globe and Mail recently.

"It's almost like gambling. Each year, you roll the dice, and you hope you'll get another year out of your infrastructure. But at some point, you have to replace it. It's always cheaper to plan a replacement than to let it collapse."

And cost will continue to escalate with inaction. According to a report released by the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO), more extreme rainfall will add \$6.2 billion to the province's linear storm and wastewater infrastructure costs by 2030, and significantly more by 2100.

The financial burden of maintaining, repairing and replacing water mains and other related infrastructure falls on municipalities, which have historically been underfunded by provincial and federal governments.

Most cities have asset management plans that determine which sections of water mains should be replaced and in what order, helping to address problems before incidents, such as the break in Calgary, occur.

With insufficient funding, municipalities can only raise rates so high before water becomes unaffordable and the political backlash unbearable.

Just like homeowners, most governments would rather spend time and money on the “sexy stuff” rather than on essentials.

So instead of tackling the backlog of water infrastructure projects they attempt to distract us with 24 packs of beer in grocery stores.

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