

NMWD contends with water thieves

THEFTS ENDANGER PUBLIC HEALTH & DESTROY PUBLIC PROPERTY

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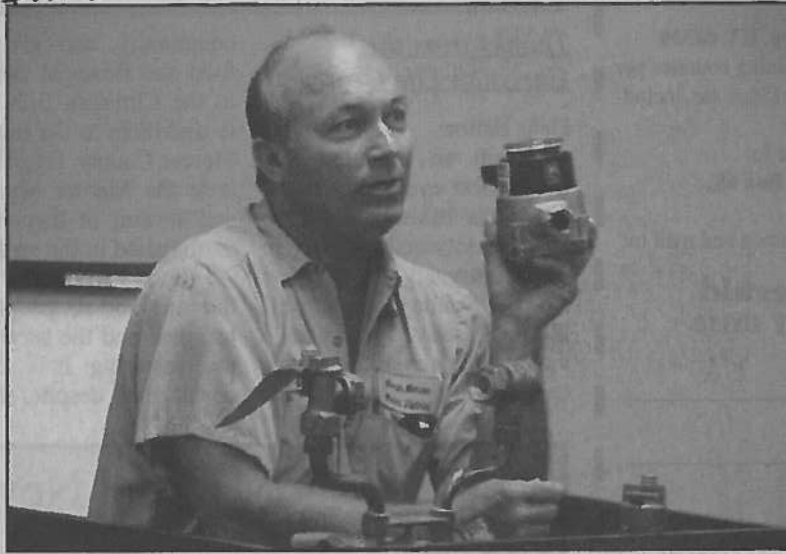
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People are stealing water. They are breaking into the water system maintained by the North Mercer Water District. District officials say not only are the thieves stealing a public-owned utility, they are also endangering the safety of their neighbors' drinking water.

Workers have found half a dozen water thefts over the last few months, says attorney Tom Jones. Jones represents the Water District. He went before the Mercer County Fiscal Court to discuss the issue Tuesday morning.

"It's so easy to break into a water system," Jones said. He said



The Harrodsburg Herald/Robert Moore
Keith Curtsinger, maintenance chief for the North Mercer Water District, shows how easy it is to illegally swap out a water meter.

See NMWD 18A

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thieves are cutting the locks or ripping out water meters and replacing them with pressure reducers. The thefts endanger the drinking water of other users. Especially in older areas of the system where there are no backflow preventers.

"This is dangerous," Jones said.

Jones said the District had no way of knowing who committed the thefts. "People don't do this in the bright of day," he said.

But the District did know who benefited from the thefts. "If you own the land, you're responsible," Jones said. He said the District would prosecute landowners to the fullest extent of the law. Legally, offending landowners would have to prove they were not responsible for the theft.

Jones said a customer or two stealing water would not break the District. Their chief concerns were the damaged property and the risk posed to public drinking water. He had a message for anyone considering such a theft.

"You will be prosecuted," Jones said.