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Flying pipes: Helicopter delivers new EBMUD water pipes for challenging Berkeley Oakland Hills pipeline replacement

OAKLAND – Today, the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) airlifted nearly 2,500 feet of pipe to the Berkeley Oakland Hills just north of the Claremont Hotel. This is a first for EBMUD.

“Our pipes and drinking water traverse every street and hill of the East Bay. It’s a challenging area and sometimes upgrading our pipes requires creative problem solving,” said Director of Operations Mike Wallis.

EBMUD flew 15 bundles of new high density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe from Fernwald Road at Dwight Way up the hill to Panoramic Way. This unique delivery method resolves the difficulty of maneuvering 40 foot long pipe segments up extremely narrow, windy roads. The helicopter flight eliminates the need to cut the pipe segments, and reduces truck trips, labor hours and work time in neighborhood streets. This seismically flexible pipe replaces cast iron pipes that range from 65 to almost 100 years old. These pipes have a leak history that makes them a priority for replacement. This is the first of two planned helicopter deliveries for the Panoramic Hill Improvements Project with a second delivery scheduled later this year.

With more than 4,200 miles of water pipelines in the EBMUD service area, replacing aging pipelines is a race against time. The Panoramic Hill Improvements Project will replace more than 7,000 feet of water pipeline in the seismically-active Berkeley Oakland Hills. The project also includes the replacement of University Reservoir (underway) and University Pumping Plant, which will begin in late 2017.

“Today’s flight shows how EBMUD continues to be innovative in finding ways to serve our customers,” says EBMUD Board President Frank Mellon.

EBMUD is bringing innovation to pipeline replacement in the seismically-active, geographically complex Bay Area. The Pipeline Rebuild program uses new installation practices, materials, and techniques to speed pipeline replacement. We are testing various pipe materials that flex with earthquake movement, and pipes whose joints lock and don’t separate. We’re also testing methods and materials to rehabilitate pipelines in the ground with minimal digging and street disruption.

EBMUD has a proud history of providing high quality drinking water for 1.4 million customers in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The District’s wastewater treatment serves 680,000 customers while protecting the San Francisco Bay.