

Mexico City has its taps turned back on

Though some still suffering as system recharges, water cutoff was shorter, less severe than expected. Officials warn that the worst could be yet to come

After 3 days, Mexico City gets its water supply back

Some feel they dodged a bullet

BY DAVID AGREN
The News

Federal water officials said they had restored service to the entire Mexico City metropolitan area by late Saturday afternoon, nearly three days after cutting off supply from a basin that supplies the region with 30 percent of its drinking water.

The National Water Commission, or **Conagua**, originally suspended service on Thursday to perform maintenance work on the pipes that bring water into the capital from the Cutzamala basin, where drought conditions have also led to precipitous declines in reservoir levels.

The cutoff was initially planned to last through Sunday, but **Conagua** of-

ficials said the maintenance had gone quicker than expected.

Even so, Mexico City Water System director Ramón Aguirre said that some 25 neighborhoods in the boroughs of Benito Juárez, Iztacalco and Azcapotzalco would remain without water in the short term as pipes and cisterns slowly recharge.

The cuts severely impacted working-class Iztapalapa, but local officials said problems with pumping equipment, and not a lack of water, was prolonging the scarcity in the capital's most populous borough. A fleet of tanker trucks known as "pipas" would continue servicing thirsty Iztapalapa neighborhoods, they said.

Officials originally warned that the cutoffs would affect 400 neighbor-

hoods in 13 boroughs. Similar cuts also were scheduled for municipalities in the outlying State of Mexico, including Naucalpan, Tlalnepantla and Ecatepec. In all, up to 5 million people were warned that their taps could run dry.

But some people in the neighborhoods targeted for suspensions reported few discomforts over the holiday weekend, a time when many capital residents head out of town and reduce local water demand.

The service cutoff was initially planned to last through Sunday.

"They were supposed to cut water service around here, but nothing

Continúa en siguiente hoja



ever happened,” said Carlos Becerril, who was washing cars parked outside a popular seafood restaurant in the Colonia Narvarte on Saturday afternoon.

Becerril said he had altered his water use anyway, filling his bucket only half way and reusing water instead of running a garden hose.

Others reported similar luck in avoiding the cuts, even after taking precautions last week by filling bottles and buckets in anticipation of a dry weekend. Department store employee Luz López said her neighborhood in the Iztacalco borough was on the list for cuts that never arrived. Still, she said that everyone in her household “only used what was necessary,” and that they avoided activities such as watering plants, running loads of laundry and heavy cleaning.

Taco stand employee Luz María Acosta also said that water problems failed to reach her neighborhood in the suburb of Ecatepec, but she foresaw longer-term problems due to wasteful practices and widespread non-payment for service.

“There are so many deadbeats ... and they’re so wasteful,” she said.

Saturday was “Sábado de Gloria” in the capital, traditionally a day during Holy Week when residents stage water fights in the streets. But this year, officials had urged people to refrain from the practice, threatening fines of up to 300 times the daily minimum wage of approximately 50 pesos, and up to 36 hours in jail.

The Mexico City Public Security Secretariat reported 44 arrests by 2:30 p.m. Saturday for infractions that ranged from hosing down sidewalks in front of private homes to washing cars to water fights.

DOOM AND GLOOM

While the most recent cutoffs were due to maintenance, **Conagua** has also been reducing the water supply from the seven dams that comprise the Cutzamala basin by 50 percent for one weekend per month since February.

Conagua had planned on carrying out the cuts until the beginning of the summer rainy season, but it has since warned that those disruptions could

be extended due to ongoing drought conditions in the area. The water level in the basin has dropped to its lowest level in 16 years, officials say.

Aguirre, the city water chief, told reporters that the dams and pipes in the basin, which are managed by **Conagua**, require urgent updates totaling 5 billion pesos. “If this maintenance isn’t done, sooner or later there are going to be crises of unimaginable magnitudes,” he said.

Conagua officials, who have been critical of their counterparts in the capital, said in a Saturday press release that the Mexico City government must invest more in fixing leaky pipes that lose nearly 40 percent of the water meant for delivery.

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Defying a possible punishment, a D.F. boy douses himself on “Sábado de Gloria.”

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