H.R. LaBounty Safety Awards Nomination Form

Nomination Deadlines:

Spring Awards: **February 3, 2025**

Fall Awards: **September 2, 2025**

Agency: Fair Oaks Water District

Project/Initiative Title: From Fatigue to Fire-Ready: A Proactive Approach to Hydrant Safety

Implementation Date: 3/1/2025

Cost to Implement: $6,500

Staff Time Required: 8 Hours

Number of Employees/Facilities Impacted: 4

Employee/Department/Committee Nominated:

Name(s): Tanner Castillo & Mike Northcutt

Job Title/Department: Distribution System Operators – Maintenance Department

Nomination Summary

Our agency recently implemented the use of a tool called the *Hydrant Buddy* to support our Fire Hydrant and Valve Maintenance Programs. This initiative was driven by our operators in the field, Tanner Castillo and Mike Northcutt. They identified the need to reduce operator fatigue and repetitive motion injuries associated with exercising hydrants and water main valves—especially those that are aged, corroded, or difficult to operate.

Problem Recognized:
Field staff reported increasing physical strain and fatigue while performing these maintenance programs, particularly when dealing with stubborn or infrequently used valves. These tasks often require excessive force and repetitive motion, increasing the risk of musculoskeletal injuries and reducing operational efficiency.

Corrective Action Initiated:
Recognizing the hazard, our team researched and acquired the *Hydrant Buddy*, a mechanical assist device designed to reduce the physical effort required to operate hydrants. The goal was to introduce an engineering control that would minimize strain, improve safety, and extend the longevity of both personnel and equipment.

Actions Taken:

- Conducted a field trial of the Hydrant Buddy on a particularly difficult dry barrel hydrant.
- Trained staff on proper use and integrated the tool into our standard maintenance procedures.
- Used the tool to successfully exercise a hydrant that had previously been nearly inoperable.

Best Practices and Impact:
Three days after a difficult hydrant was serviced using the Hydrant Buddy, a house fire occurred in the same area. The responding fire crew connected to that very hydrant—now fully operational thanks to the maintenance effort. This real-world event underscored the critical importance of proactive maintenance and the value of the new tool.

Hazard Mitigation Approach:
This initiative reduced risk through **engineering controls**—specifically, the introduction of a mechanical assist device. It also led to the development of new **administrative procedures** for tool use and maintenance documentation.

Extraordinary Circumstances:
The timing of the fire incident highlighted the life-saving potential of routine maintenance work. The successful operation of the hydrant during an emergency was a direct result of the corrective action taken just days earlier.

Influence on Safety Culture:
This project has strengthened our safety culture by:

- Encouraging employee participation in identifying ergonomic hazards.
- Demonstrating management's commitment to investing in safer tools.
- Reinforcing the message that even routine tasks have critical public safety implications.

Alignment with JPIA Commitment to Excellence:
This initiative directly supports the JPIA Commitment to Excellence by addressing

ergonomic hazards, improving operational readiness, and fostering a proactive approach to workplace safety.

☒Office/Field Ergonomics

☐Vehicle Operations

☐Slip/trip/falls – falls from heights

☒Emergency Readiness/Wildfire Prevention

☐Other:

Nominated by: Joe DeBorba **Date: 7/17/2025**

General Manager: **Date:** July 28, 2025

FAIR OAKS WATER DISTRICT FAIR OAKS SACRAMENTO COUNTY CALIFORNIA ORGANIZED MARCH 26, 1917

Please email this form with supporting documents and digital photos (jpg) to tlofing@acwajpia.com.

Fire Hydrant Maintenance - Job Hazard Analysis

Date:	Type of Work:	Location/Job#:	Contract#:
9/2/2025	Fire Hydrant Maintenance	Sidewalks, Utility Easements	
	Engineer:	**Superintendent:**	**Safety Representative:**
Created by:			Joe DeBorba

Activity Description	HAZARDS	Preventative or Correction Actions to be Taken
Locate hydrant and inspect	Traffic hazards	Wear high-visibility clothing
	Uneven terrain	Use cones/signage
	Wildlife	Wear Safety Boots
Remove hydrant cap	Hand injuries	Use proper tools
	Rusted or seized parts	Wear gloves
		Apply **Food Grade** penetrating oil if needed and Apply Food Grade Anti Seize before reinstallation.
Exercise hydrant valve	Strain injuries	Use ergonomic posture
	Repetitive motions	Turn valve slowly and steadily
	Uneven or awkward force	Utilizing mechanical tools

Paint hydrant	Inhalation of fumes	Wear gloves and mask
	Skin contact with chemicals	SDS Information sheet kept on vehicle
Document maintenance	Data entry errors	Use standardized forms

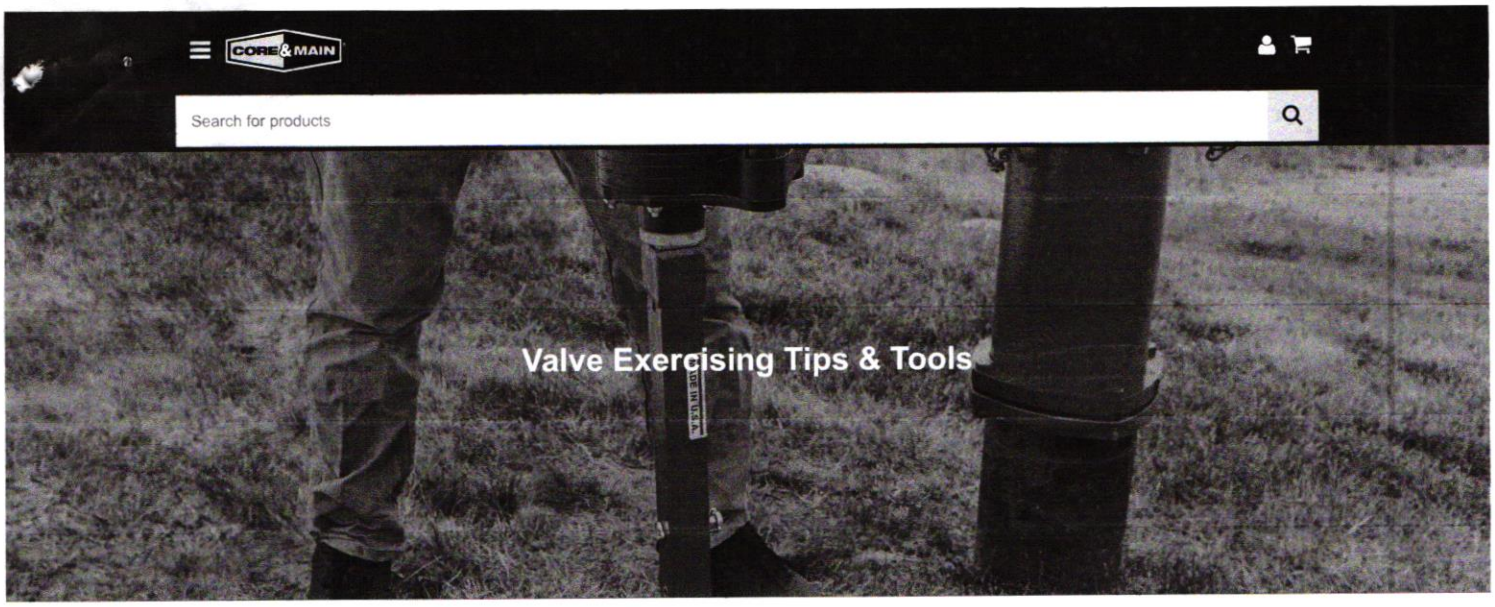
FAIR OAKS WATER DISTRICT WEEKLY TAILGATE SAFETY MEETING

Date: 9-2-25	Time: 3:30 pm
Location: Fair Oaks Water District 10317 Fair Oaks Blvd	
Presenter: Joe DeBorba & Tanner Castillo	
Subject: Hydrant Buddy Equipment Training & Valve Exercising	
Resource: Hydro Verge	

ATTENDEES

Name:	Signature:
Naylor, Chris	
Ames, Chris	
Barberini, Dominic	
Barragan, Robert	
Castillo, Tanner	
Chetcuti, Blake	
Dains, Colton	
DeBorba, Joseph	
Gospodnetich, John	
Jones, Mike	
Karpowich, Justin	
Kepler, Nick	
Lahr, Gary	
Northcutt, Mike	
Ross, Bill	
Shankle, Keith	
Singley, Brian	
Thompson, Lawson	
Williams, George	
Yount, Ryan	

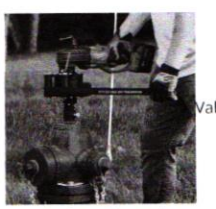
Operations Superintendent: Nick Kepler Date: _____



12/11/2024

Valves are crucial components in municipal water and wastewater systems, controlling water flow to homes, businesses and industries. In this article, we'll explore what valve exercising is, why it's important, tools of the trade and easy tips to remember while in the field.

What is Valve Exercising?



Valve exercising is the process of manually or automatically opening and closing valves to ensure they continue to function properly. Over time, valves can seize or become stiff due to corrosion, mineral buildup or lack of use. Exercising helps break up any buildup and allows operators to inspect the valve for signs of decay or malfunction.

Municipal valves found on hydrants, water lines, pipes and various other equipment need regular exercise to remain serviceable and avoid unexpected failures. Ensuring your municipality follows a regular exercise schedule can save you time, energy and money.

Why is Valve Exercising Necessary?

Valves are integral to water and wastewater processing, clean water delivery, lift stations and collection systems and more. There are dozens of types of valves, but all have the same purpose: to control the flow of water, isolate sections of pipe for repairs, and ensure safe and efficient distribution or collection. However, without regular maintenance, valves can deteriorate over time, leading to problems like stuck or malfunctioning valves. Valve exercising addresses these issues and ensures valves are ready for use.

It's important to exercise valves on a regular schedule, and routine maintenance has several benefits. Exercising valves prevents seizing, extends their lifespan, and allows your team to identify potential damage before the valve malfunctions. It is also a quick and relatively easy way to ensure minimal disruption to facility and collection system processes.

The AWWA (American Water Works Association) defines the practice of valve exercising as; "[valves] should be operated through a full cycle and returned to its normal position on a schedule that is designed to prevent a buildup of tuberculation or other deposits that could render the valve inoperable or prevent a tight shut-off."

You can learn more about hydrant flushing and valve exercising programs online or by reaching out to your local AWWA or RWA (Rural Water Association) organization.

FOUD SOP's

Top Tips

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Valve exercising may seem straightforward, but it's important to approach with care and avoid causing costly damage. Here are some practical tips for effective valve exercising:

Don't Force the Valve

If a valve feels stuck, avoid forcing it open. Forcing a valve can damage the valve and the equipment used to turn it. Instead, inspect the valve for corrosion or buildup and try to clear the obstruction before attempting to turn it again. In some instances, you can utilize a valve-safe degreaser to clear debris or corrosive buildup.

Take Your Time

Take your time with the valve-exercising process. It's important to be thorough and methodical, inspecting the valve while refraining from jerking motions. Rushing can lead to damage and mistakes while exercising.

Use the Lowest Torque Setting Possible

Always start with the lowest torque setting when using an automatic valve exerciser. Applying too much force can cause unnecessary strain on the valve. Only increase the torque if necessary and avoid over-tightening.

Avoid Using a Cheater Bar

A cheater bar (aka a pry bar)—a lever extension that allows for more torque—should generally be avoided. While it may seem like a quick solution to stuck valves, it can cause excessive stress, leading to long-term damage. Use a cheater bar only in emergencies when other methods have failed, and exercise extreme caution to avoid permanently damaging the valve.

Valve Exercising Tools

Valve exercising is a simple process made easier by manual or automatic tools designed for the task. There are handheld and truck mounted valve exercisers, and handheld exercisers can be manual or automatic. Handheld automatic exercisers are becoming more common in the industry due to their versatility and portability.

The Hydrant Buddy is a popular Milwaukee-powered tool used for hydrant and gate valve exercising. This battery-operated handheld equipment produces high-torque at low-rpm to effectively exercise valves while avoiding damage and strain.

The Reed Electric Power Drive is another popular piece of equipment, and the corded version sheds the weight of a battery.

A gate valve key is often seen on service trucks for manual valve turning. These levers are manually operated and come in various lengths, designs, and sizes for better ergonomics depending on the valve being exercised. A cheater-bar will be employed to turn stuck valves that a valve key is not suited for.

Prioritizing Valve Exercising

Valve exercising is vital for ensuring the longevity, reliability, and efficiency of water and wastewater systems. By regularly exercising valves, water and wastewater professionals can prevent seizing, identify early signs of wear, and maintain collection system performance.

In the long run, valve exercising helps avoid costly repairs, reduces the risk of system failures, and keeps essential water services running smoothly. By prioritizing fire hydrant maintenance and valve exercising, you can keep your infrastructure in top shape, protect public health, and ensure the smooth operation of your water and wastewater systems.

Curious about what products and programs can help streamline your valve exercising schedule? Get in touch with one of our expert account managers.