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Burst 1,350mm pipeline in Sungai Prai: Remaining 30 per cent of affected consumers to get water supply in stages today



GEORGE TOWN: Water supply to about 70 per cent of 120,000 affected consumers in the southwest district has normalised.

They have been facing water supply disruption since Tuesday due to a burst 1,350mm-long pipeline lying on the riverbed of Sungai Prai.

Many have taken to social media to lash out at Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) for the water supply disruption, which stretched out for more than 50 hours in some areas.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said water supply recovery for the remaining 30 per cent of consumers, including those in the end-of-line (EoL) and higher ground areas, would be gradually restored in stages later today.

He said the Sungai Prai underwater pipeline incident was an emergency response incident.

He said when the mishap occurred, PBAPP tried its best to respond to a time-sensitive issue in a dangerous and unfamiliar environment, under difficult circumstances.

"PBAPP's initial plan to weld a plate to cover a hole on the pipeline failed because it is likely that the welds could not withstand the huge water pressure exerted to pump treated water from the Sungai Dua water treatment plant (WTP) to Penang island through the 1,350mm pipeline.

"Thankfully, Plan B, or the steel plate clamp solution, is working for now.

"Many affected water consumers are angry and disappointed because PBAPP delayed the normalisation of water supply services twice since Tuesday.

"PBAPP is trying its best to ensure water supply recovery for the remaining 30 per cent of consumers in stages later today," he said.

Chow said PBAPP had apologised repeatedly to the people. He said he had also told PBAPP's chief executive officer K. Pathmanathan to accept all constructive critiques and complaints in good faith because water supply is an essential public service.

"Pathmanathan and his team must strive to do better in January 2024, in terms of meeting deadlines," he added.

A total of 14 PBAPP, Pasukan Bomba Sukarela (PBS) and Penang Island City Council (MBPP) tankers have been working hard delivering water to affected consumers since Wednesday.

From 10.30am today, a fleet of 15 additional outstation water tankers from Air Kelantan, Air Selangor, Lembaga Air Perak, Pengurusan Air Pahang, Syarikat Air Johor, Syarikat Air Melaka, and Syarikat Air Terengganu have been deployed to fetch water to affected consumers.

Chow said, while striving to achieve 100 per cent water supply services recovery as soon as possible, the PBAPP team was also carefully monitoring the performance of the repaired section of the pipeline to ensure that it would not burst again.

He said the emergency pipe clamp was a temporary solution to recover water supply services for the affected water consumers in the shortest possible time.

He said there is still a small leak on-site that would affect Penang's non-revenue water (NRW) or water loss.

"However, the important result is that PBAPP is able to continue pumping sufficient water to meet the needs on Penang island from today, in time for the year-end festive season.

"PBAPP data indicates that this 1,350mm underwater pipeline was laid by the previous Pihak Berkuasa Air (PBA) in 1996, before PBAPP was corporatised. We do not know how or when it was damaged. It is difficult to investigate the cause because the pipeline is resting on the riverbed, 3.5m below the river surface.

"According to PBAPP, the rational long-term solution to prevent another Sungai Prai incident is to replace that section of pipeline.

"Hence, PBAPP is proposing to undertake a RM5 million project next year to lay a new 200 metre section of pipeline that will be mounted on a 'river crossing' structure," he added.