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Family sues village over low hydrant pressure

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A family from unincorporated DuPage County near Lisle has filed a federal class-action lawsuit on behalf of themselves and 400 other families against the village of Lisle and a water company for allegedly failing to provide enough water pressure to extinguish a fire. Susan and Jeffrey Srail accuse the Illinois American Water Co. and the village of Lisle of misconduct that caused the Oak View subdivision's water system to be "so inadequate that it cannot reliably deliver even the minimum water pressure needed to put out a fire at a home or school in the neighborhood," according to a release from the Collins Law Firm, which is representing the Srail family.

The suit was filed Wednesday.

The situation was highlighted in a report by investigative reporter Dave Savini published Tuesday in The Sun and which aired Monday night on CBS 2.

As a result of the report, a state legislator is proposing tougher reporting requirements for private companies responsible for maintaining hydrants.

"The fact that there are broken hydrants in front of schools just breaks my heart," state Rep. Renee Kozel, R-New Lenox, said.

Hydrants operated by Illinois American Water were left inoperable for months, yet fire departments were not notified.

Kozel said she is drafting legislation requiring immediate notification of broken hydrants to fire departments and faster repairs.

The Oak View subdivision water system is maintained and operated by Illinois American, under a contract with the village, the release said. "The village has given Illinois American a monopoly," said Shawn Collins, the lawyer representing the Srails.

Village should have acted

Collins said Illinois American does not have direct access to Lake Michigan water. The company uses village of Lisle pipes and pays the village 84 cents per 1,000 gallons delivered. Collins argued the contract between the village and Illinois American came with certain responsibilities, providing adequate water quality among them. Collins said the village should've taken action against Illinois American when that contract was broken.

According to the Lisle fire chief, the water system is "dead" and unable to deliver the minimum water pressure required by state law, the release said. The low pressure creates a threat that fires will not be extinguished in a timely manner and makes the water supply more susceptible to contamination and bacteria, the suit claims.

The Srails have sued the village for refusing to provide subdivision residents with a properly functioning water system and refusing to demand that Illinois American comply with state law and provide a safe system, the release said. The suit accuses the water company of "reckless failure to maintain the Oak View system" and claims low pressure causes fire hydrants to not work, the release said.

In a written statement, Karla Olson Teasley, president of Illinois American Water Co., said that throughout the litigation, Illinois American is committed to providing service.

Jerry Sprecher, Lisle village manager, said he could not comment at this time. Robert Bush, the lawyer representing the village from the firm Ancel, Glink, Diamond, Bush, DiCianni & Krafthefer, P.C. said he had read over the lawsuit but had not spoken with his client and could not comment until he had done so.

CBS 2's Dave Savini contributed to this Sun-Times News Group report.

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