

Fire fighting in hometown demonstrates water use

Lt still seems surreal – but it happened in early March 2007. The large Seneca Grade School was totally destroyed by fire. It was a grand building, constructed with materials that solicited long term service such as beautiful terrazzo flooring, red brick and white accent stones on the exterior, limestone window sills, a clay tile roof. But it is now a pile of rubble – bricks and stones mixed with twisted steel beams.

The 911 call came into police dispatch at about 2:00 a.m. that calm March 10 morning. A resident near the school called it in, hearing the school's fire alarms ringing. Emergency crews didn't know what to expect other than hopefully it was just a false alarm. The

Seneca Volunteer Fire Department quickly rolled up on the scene and proceeded with caution to where the smoke and flames appeared in the school. Firefighters started dousing the flames with water from their fire hoses. But

they could not gain on it as the fire was well along. The flames were fueled by the old and well-dried lacquered wood in the gymnasium and other interior portions of the 69 year-old building. As the flames punched through the roof it weakened, causing it to collapse. With that, the flames spread throughout the rest of the school. Fire crews were

called from neighboring towns of Bern and Centralia; they joined in the battle.

The departments had all five pumper trucks connected to hydrants, pumping water through

at a peak rate of 1,300 gallons per minute. An estimated 400,000 gallons of water was applied to the fire. But the city had no concerns of running short on water because of water that

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two 4-inch, an 8-inch, a 10-inch and a 14-inch water line, all supplied by the city's 500,000-gallon elevated storage water tower. Over a 7-hour span, the city's water storage was lowered by about 10 feet with fire fighting

remained in the storage tank. The city also has a million-gallon storage at the water plant on the east edge of town from which high service pumps resupply the elevated tank on the west side of the town.



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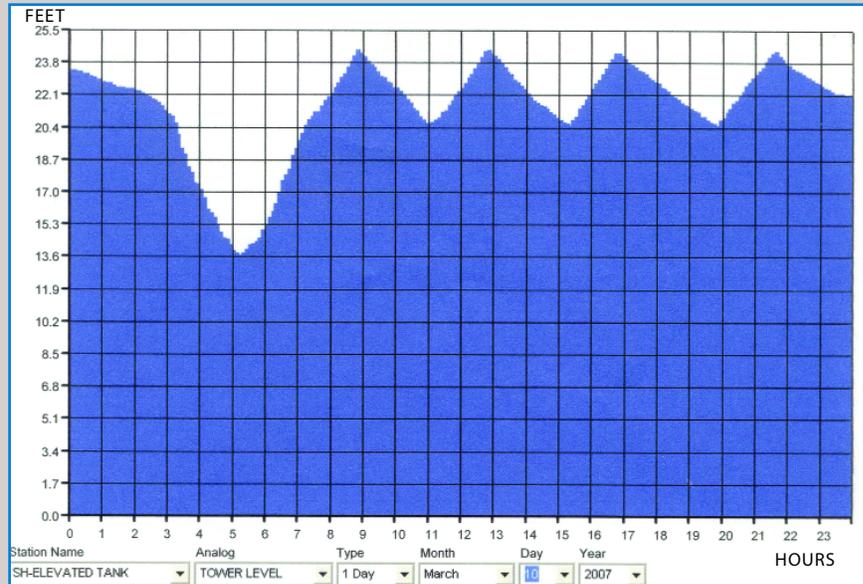


The Seneca March 10, 2007 grade school blaze being fought by Seneca, Bern and Centralia fire departments. They pumped over 400,000 gallons of water from the Seneca water utility storage tank to fight the 2 a.m. fire.

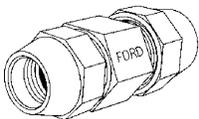
News travels fast in a small town, even in the early morning hours. Staff from the school, local citizens and students all came to watch in disbelief as the building was engulfed in flames. It is a sad loss as a lot of history is no longer available. Many memories went up in smoke. Classes resumed in the city's library, American Legion Post 21, and other buildings with usable classroom space.

I wrote about this fire, not so much because of the loss of "our" school, but because of the documentation that the city has available to monitor the water distribution system. That chart is printed with this article. Your town or RWD might want to review your emergency operating procedures were a fire of this magnitude to hit your community. It was an anxious time too for my dad; he's the manager for the city's water and wastewater departments.

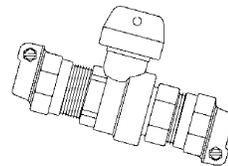
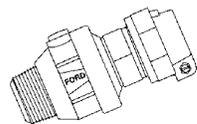
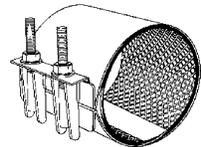
Water Storage Fluctuation During Seneca Fire



Water usage for March 10, 2007 increases dramatically after 2 a.m. when the fire departments started arriving on the scene of the fire with the high rate of water usage continuing until about 5 a.m. according to the city of Seneca water storage tank chart above.



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