

PRESS RELEASE

September 21, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The City of Hazard, Kentucky responded today to a report on WYMT News regarding a fire loss which occurred on Tuesday afternoon on Maces Creek in Perry County. An issue was raised during the report regarding lack of access to a “water hydrant” and the suggestion was made that access to the hydrant could have made a difference in the ability of the volunteer fire department to extinguish the fire more quickly. The City sincerely regrets the fire loss for the family in this instance, but the news report and certain of the statements made by members of the volunteer fire department was misleading and was based upon a common misunderstanding of the nature of water service which is afforded by the City of Hazard in most areas of Perry County outside the city limits. The City of Hazard furnishes water free of charge to volunteer fire departments for use in fighting fires throughout the county, but the City’s water system is not designed to furnish fire protection in areas outside or adjacent to the city limits.

The City’s water supply system which has been extended into sometimes remote sections of the county is intended to supply potable water for drinking and other ordinary household use and is not designed to provide water under sufficient flow rate for fire protection service. The elimination of fire protection service from waterlines extended into the County was not a matter of choice made by the City of Hazard, but was the result of both physical factors such as system hydraulics and governmental policy by funding agencies. A majority of the miles of waterlines installed by the City throughout the county in the past 15-20 years were funded by grants from Abandoned Mine Lands (“AML”) funds, and it is the policy of AML’s funding agency to fund waterlines for household use only and not for fire protection.

The “hydrant” which was referenced in WYMT’s report in this instance was not in fact a fire hydrant at all, and was merely a flushing valve used by City water employees to maintain the waterline. This type of valve does somewhat resemble a traditional fire hydrant, but it is not installed for nor intended for use in fire protection. These valves are also known as “flushing hydrants” which are normally smaller in size (about half the size of a fire hydrant) and are intended only for flushing water pipelines. Any valve can be used to refill a water container such as a tanker truck, but these valves are not reliable sources of water for structural fire fighting and are not recognized by the National Fire Protection Association for such use.

Although the public may not always be aware of the limitations of the City’s water supply system, all volunteer fire departments and fire personnel throughout Perry County should be well aware of the limited purpose of the pipelines. They own and maintain fire trucks with onboard water capacity and pumping capacity and use additional tanker trucks to carry extra water to local fires. Each of those departments has the capability to access water free of charge from the City at or near those departments in order to fill their fire trucks and tanker trucks for use in fire protection. When local departments anticipate the need for assistance, they call on other volunteer departments or on the City itself. The City’s own fire department responded to yesterday’s fire and rendered assistance to the Viper Fire Department as requested.