

Water Works officials respond to fire hydrant issue at Kingston Homes

Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT: Mac Underwood Birmingham Water Works (205) 288-2097

Water Works officials respond to fire hydrant issue at Kingston Homes Fire hydrant operations top-notch; malfunction appears to be result of vandalism (BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – July 27, 2012) – Birmingham Water Works officials have been investigating the cause of a malfunctioning fire hydrant during a fire at the Kingston Homes public housing community in North Birmingham. BWWB officials found that the stem of the fire hydrant was broken, preventing water from coming out of the hydrant when opened. “Very often, this is the result of attempted water theft, vandalism or people tampering with the hydrants so children can play in the water,” says Sonny Jones, assistant general manager of engineering and maintenance, who oversees fire hydrant operations. “Sometimes, unauthorized or improper usage damages the hydrants and if no one reports it, we do not know to replace or repair it. We don’t find out it is out of order until no water comes out in the event of a fire emergency. That appears to be what happened at Kingston Homes.” Water Works officials say fire districts and fire hydrant owners are responsible for testing the hydrants twice per year and reporting problems to BWWB officials. BWWB replaces or repairs hydrants when they are reported. With more than 14,000 fire hydrants in the service area, BWWB officials report that more than 2,200 hydrants were repaired and nearly 200 were replaced in the past year. Of those hydrants, officials say, not a single one has remained out of service for longer than one day. It takes a lot of training to be able to properly operate a fire hydrant, officials say. That’s why BWWB hosted their first annual Fire Drill in October 2011. Fire chiefs, captains and other officials from the 33 municipalities BWWB provides water to were invited to attend the free drill where officials discussed fire protection planning, covered inspection and demonstrated proper fire hydrant operation. BWWB officials plan to host the drill again in October of this year, although officials say they are readily available to demonstrate proper fire hydrant operation to fire departments upon request. “These hydrants can be easily damaged if not operated correctly and in some instances, such as we believe happened here, improper operation can result in enough damage to make the hydrant completely inoperable,” says Jones. “The damage is usually discovered when the hydrant must be put into service to fight a fire and then it is too late.” Founded in 1951, the Birmingham Water Works serves 600,000 people in Jefferson, Shelby, Blount, St. Clair and Walker counties. For more information about your Birmingham Water Works Board, please call us at (205) 244-4000 or visit our Web site at www.birminghamwaterworks.com. ###