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## **EARTHQUAKES INADVERTENTLY LEAD TO NEW WATER SYSTEM**

**BLANDFORD, MA** – While it seems peculiar that an earthquake would bring federal, state and local officials to Blandford today it was, at least partially the reason behind a visit to the town, from USDA Rural Development State Director, David Tuttle and officials from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. “It seems that the tremors of Blandford’s 2000 earthquake were felt as far away as Washington, D.C.” said Tuttle.

In April, 2002 over \$2 million in federal loan and grant funds were awarded to Blandford in order to repair the towns’ water distribution system. The federal assistance came after the region was unexpectedly rattled by two small tremors in the summer of 2000. The surprising seismic activity triggered numerous water main breaks in the towns’ aged and already challenged water system making it apparent to Blandford officials and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection that the town water system urgently required updating.

The 2002 Farm Bill provided a second phase of loan and grant funds for the towns’ water project totaling over \$2.3 million. The federal dollars were used for the continued upgrading of troublesome portions of the distribution system and for the pre-construction development of a new water treatment facility. “The water system in Blandford was old and way over due for upgrading,” said Blandford Board of Selectmen Chair, Chet Broughton. “The Town was attempting to replace a small portion of piping each year. But, the earthquakes that we experienced expedited our need to take action. It gives me great pleasure to say that the old water system is now being replaced with a state of the art system that will last for many years to come. We are very grateful to Rural Development, the Massachusetts DEP and our local legislators for their assistance. Without all of their help and the help of our local Water Commissioners, and Water Department Employees none of this would be possible.”

Today at the official groundbreaking ceremony for Blandford’s new water system, USDA Rural Development State Director Tuttle announced that the agency expects to provide a third phase of federal funding next year in

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order to complete the overhaul of Blandford's water system and finish construction of the filtration facility. Added State Director Tuttle, "This administration understands the needs of this rural community and that it is essential that we provide our communities with the financial support they need to protect and enhance their water and sewer systems."

The Blandford water system was, for the most part, constructed in the 1950's yet some portions of the system were put into place as far back as the 1900's. The water mains consisted mainly of asbestos cement (AC), and unlined cast iron pipes which although, at the time of construction was considered state of the art material, are now known to be undesirable and even hazardous. The old age of the system coupled with high pressure, insufficient pipe material strength and shallow water main burial has also contributed to the overall failure of the old system.

David M. Lenart, Senior Project Manager for Tighe & Bond of Westfield, MA, the engineering firm working on the Blandford water project said, "with the repeated failure of the water transmission pipelines, the Board of Water Commissioners and the Board of Selectmen saw the immediate and urgent need for upgrading the system to provide a safe and reliable water supply for the Town and immediately undertook planning and the search for funding assistance. As a result of the efforts of the Town officials, USDA Rural Development was able to fund the upgrades to the system and now three construction contracts are underway."

In a statement regarding today's groundbreaking in Blandford Congressman John Olver added, "It is essential that we provide our communities with the financial support they need to protect and enhance their water systems. This funding for Blandford demonstrates USDA Rural Development's commitment to improving the health and lives of residents in western Massachusetts."

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