Global811 Magazine

2025 Issue 2

DAMAGES

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from the PUBLISHER

By **Roger Cox**, President, ACTS Now, Inc.

If you ask most in this industry what our goal is as it relates to underground utilities, the answer is a reduction in damages. To be sure, the goal has changed a bit. It's gone from zero damages to a reduction in damage by 50% in 5 years. I overheard one stakeholder say, "If we can reduce them by only 10%, at least we're headed in the right direction."

I can't help but wonder if we're chasing the wrong goal! Hear me out. After chasing the goal of reducing damage for more than 25 years, we're told in conferences at the national and state levels that underground damage continues to increase, or at best, remains flat. And that statement is usually followed by explanations and/or excuses of exactly why that is, and they always sound perfectly reasonable and likely are true based on the goal we chase.

But what would happen if we began as an industry, focusing on a different goal? Consider, for a moment, the goal of behavioral change. We already know the behaviors that lead to damage. Now we need to understand the process of behavioral change to implement it. If we were able to implement such a process that could lead us to change our habits or behaviors, would there be a reduction in damages? And if we believed this might work, wouldn't we at least want to know about it?

My conviction is that we must recognize that what we have is not what we want and will not get us where we want to go. Recognizing the need to change is the step that starts the process of better understanding the importance of accountability and influence by example. Furthermore, we must recognize the differences in the stakeholder groups. While there are many different stakeholders in the industry, they align themselves with the three primary groups: owner/operators, excavators and locators. Other than the obvious "we've got to have better communication," there are specific requirements each group must meet that are uniquely different from the other.

The shift from industry stakeholders' frustration experienced today, to an environment where most stakeholders work together automatically, is a case study in how legal mandates, cultural change, and effective communication can reshape behavior over time.

To be fair, the industry has already implemented some of the tools to be successful. The laws and rules to conduct business are in place, and most of them are good. Public awareness and education are in place and are valuable tools to assist in the cultural shift. Enforcement that is consistent, fair, and effective is a critical tool that must remain in place to ensure accountability. Equipment manufacturers, software designers and technology entrepreneurs are leading the entire industry to be more efficient and safer.

However, the significant reduction in damages we seek continues to elude us, partly because we have failed as an industry to hold ourselves accountable to make safe digging a widely accepted and automatic habit. We're chasing a number rather than creating a culture shift. The former is an activity that doesn't require much involvement; the latter is a commitment that involves self-inspection and change.

How will it happen that safe digging becomes second nature and just part of the process of completing the project? It begins with creating a new normal for the industry. Owners must take ownership of the projects. The excavator and locator are a direct reflection of the owners' influence in the industry. Both the excavator and locator should be required to meet the expectations mandated by the owners. Failing to do so should have consequences. Not digging safely should be increasingly seen as reckless or irresponsible. Of course, some owners take ownership of their reputation, and as more owners take ownership of their image, others will follow suit.

The generation moving into the workforce as excavators or locators will learn from the company's culture they grew up with. These young men and women who grew up with safe digging cultures will typically adopt the same habit of safe digging, creating a generational shift. Industry publications, conferences, and safety videos showing safe digging and its components, such as calling 811 before digging, locating accurately and on time, properly exposing utilities before crossing them and many other best practices can be seen as routine and smart, reinforcing the industry's norm.

"Impossible," you say! Every day, people who declare something to be impossible are being passed by people who didn't know it couldn't be done. I agree with you that moving the needle will be difficult, but the more we work together, the louder and clearer our voices will become.

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Roger Cox, Publisher
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Enforcing Accountability: Defending Utility Damage Claims When the Excavator Is Not at Fault

By Wayne Jensen, VP – Director of Safety, Stahl & Associates Insurance, A Higginbotham Partner

In today's excavation landscape, defending against utility damage claims hinges not just on good intentions or common practices, but on **enforceable documentation**—collected *before* any damage occurs. Without a comprehensive, well-documented file demonstrating the excavator acted responsibly and adhered to best practices, claims defense becomes an uphill battle.

We now operate in a utility damage prevention culture where proactive documentation is no longer optional—it's **essential.** Every excavator must rigorously document their own adherence to damage prevention standards **and** verify the actions of locators. If you're not treating every job like a potential claim is already pending, you're exposed.

Enforcement Begins with Documentation

Damage can happen anywhere on-site, so your documentation must be **comprehensive and timely**. Waiting until after a damage occurs is too late—key evidence such as locate mark positions may already be erased by construction activity. Your defense must be built before the first shovel hits the ground.

Below is an **enforcement-focused checklist** every field team should use—not only to prevent damage but to **solidify an irrefutable defense** when they are not at fault.

✓ Positive Response Verification

Have you reviewed and documented all positive responses for your jobsite? Yes or No.

Despite 811 being around for years, most field crews—including foremen and superintendents—still don't understand what a *positive response* actually means. Many rely solely on a paper ticket for compliance, failing to verify that all responses have been returned and interpreted correctly.

Enforcement Tip: Positive response documentation should be **required and reviewed** on-site *daily.* In states like Florida, only 3 out of 23 codes confirm the site is marked or clear. The other 20 indicate **no-go conditions.** Not verifying these is negligence.

✓ Photographic Evidence of Locate Marks

Have you photographed all locate marks as referenced in the positive response? Yes or No.

Field photography of locate marks isn't just a best practice—it's a **non-negotiable enforcement tool**. Some contractors mandate photos to qualify for claim defense support. If subs fail to comply, the damage cost is deducted from their next invoice. The result? Fewer claims, better compliance.

Enforcement Tip: Use a measurement tool or range poles with fixed reference points (e.g., curbs, sidewalks) to record exact mark locations. Photograph the full range pole (typically 12 feet) for scale. This enables accurate mark reconstruction *after* they're destroyed.

✓ Potholing and Locate Accuracy Verification

Have you potholed key facilities and documented the measurements and depth relative to the locate marks? Yes or No.

Excavators are often the only ones who uncover buried infrastructure. This makes

potholing a dual-purpose enforcement tool: verifying the accuracy of marks and documenting locator performance.

Enforcement Tip: Treat potholing like post-damage investigation. Use measurement tools to photo-document depth and offset. This data not only protects you—it provides **essential feedback** to facility owners and locators.

Gas Line Marker Pylon Documentation

Have you photographed all gas line marker pylons near the work area? Yes or No.

Large gas lines may exist even if only small lines are marked. Overlooking this is a massive risk—both from a liability and safety perspective.

Enforcement Tip: Make it a standard procedure to scout the surrounding area for pylons and other above-ground indicators. Document everything. Enforcement starts with visibility.

Fiber Optic Pylon Documentation

Have you photographed all fiber optic pylons in the work zone? Yes or No.

Fiber optic damage is **expensive.** A single misstep can lead to six-figure damage claims and service disruptions.

Enforcement Tip: Include fiber optic documentation in your pre-excavation checklist. No exceptions. High-risk utilities demand **high-standard enforcement.**

Unmarked Surface Indicator Reporting

Have you identified and reported any unmarked surface indicators to 811? Yes or No.

The existence of unmarked surface features—like pedestals or vaults—demands immediate reporting. If not addressed, you risk being held accountable for another party's oversight.

Enforcement Tip: Surface feature checks should be mandatory on all jobs. Train field teams to **look beyond** their immediate dig zone. Missing a pedestal 200 feet away could cost you the claim.

Documentation as a Deterrent—and a Shield

These six practices are not just about protecting your company in the event of a claim—they are the foundation of active enforcement on the job site. These methods:

- **Deter negligence** by field teams and subcontractors
- **Expose locator inaccuracies** before they become liabilities
- **Create enforceable records** that hold up during claims investigations
- **Improve safety** and reduce downtime

Utility owners and locate companies want to know when their systems fail. Excavators are often the only boots on the ground who can provide this insight—but only if they're documenting it.

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The Importance of Utility and Excavator Involvement in MDPC Legislative Meetings

BY Cole Fesmire, Vice President, Director of Operations, Mississippi 811, Inc.

In the ever-evolving landscape of construction, the safety and well-being of communities depend heavily on proactive measures taken by industry professionals. In Mississippi, utilities owners, locators, and excavators have a unique opportunity to influence policy and ensure safety through their involvement in the Mississippi Damage Prevention Council (MDPC) legislative meetings. These gatherings, held in various locations such as Olive Branch, Pearl, and Gulfport, serve as essential platforms for sharing insights, advocating for necessary changes, and enhancing public safety.

The MDPC stakeholders are dedicated to preventing damage to underground utilities, a critical concern for utilities and excavators. With the increasing complexity of construction projects and the prevalence of fiber utility installations, the risk of damages has increased significantly. By participating in legislative meetings, utilities owners, locators, and excavators can voice their experiences and challenges, providing valuable input that can shape effective dig laws. Their firsthand knowledge of the industry helps identify potential areas for improvement that may not be evident to lawmakers.

One of the key organizations facilitating these important discussions is Mississippi 811. As the state's One Call system, Mississippi 811 plays a pivotal role in organizing and hosting MDPC meetings throughout the state. Lobbyists actively work to gather opinions from various stakeholders, ensuring that all voices are heard. This collaborative approach is vital in creating an inclusive environment where excavators and utility representatives can come together to discuss pressing issues and develop solutions.

The past achievements of the MDPC highlight the significant role that utilities and excavators play in these legislative meetings.

For example:

The council has successfully advocated for the incorporation of electronic white lining into the law. This allows excavators to mark proposed excavation sites electronically, eliminating the need for on-site presence while still providing utility owners and locators with a precise area for the proposed work. This enhancement enables locators to better define the areas that need to be marked.

Furthermore, they have secured an additional day for locators to complete their work, ensuring that underground utilities are accurately identified before excavation begins. The ticket life has also been extended from 14 to 20 days.

Additionally, the introduction of a voluntary pre-construction ticket marks another significant milestone, emphasizing the importance of these discussions in improving safety and communication among excavators, locators, and utility owners.

By actively participating in MDPC meetings, utilities and excavators not only contribute to the legislative process but also help foster a culture of safety within the industry. Their engagement encourages the sharing of best practices and innovations that can lead to safer job sites. These meetings serve as an educational platform where professionals can network with one another learning about new technologies, regulatory updates, and strategies for effective damage prevention.

The importance of a unified voice cannot be overstated. When utilities and excavators come together to express their concerns and recommendations, they amplify their influence on policymakers. A collective stance on safety issues can lead to greater recognition from lawmakers and increased likelihood of favorable legislative outcomes. By uniting their voices, these professionals demonstrate the significance of their work and the need for effective damage prevention measures.

Building Resilient Communities: How Municipalities Can Improve Utility Safety During Roadwork

BY Jim Plasynski, Chief Revenue Officer, KorTerra

Over the past several years, the damage prevention environment for municipalities has been evolving rapidly. Fiber projects and the broader monies associated with the $1.3 Trillion Infrastructure Bill (which represented a nearly $600 billion increase over any previously allocated amounts) have hit communities at a pace and scale that, in many geographies, hasn't been seen before. With this rapid evolution, roadwork and the associated underground excavation have presented growing challenges for municipalities responsible for providing safe environments and ensuring service resiliency in the communities they serve.

"Fiber is coming to town and with it, PROJECT TICKETS!"

This is a familiar phrase that has likely been uttered in many communities across the U.S. and Canada in recent years. Along with it comes the challenge of ensuring that as underground work increases, assets are protected, critical services operate uninterrupted, and crews can perform work safely.

For anyone who has been in damage prevention for a while, one thing is clear: not all tickets and underground excavation are created equal. A half-mile project ticket for a fiber installation along a major road in town compared to a homeowner planting a tree both count as one ticket, but for a locating technician responsible for marking both, the work difference can range from 15 minutes to 4-8 hours. This means smaller municipalities, commonly with locating crews of 1-5 individuals, can be inundated and struggle to keep up. The result? Tickets can be late, locate technicians may rush and make errors, excavators might dig without marks, and project delays can lead to rushed efforts by construction crews responsible for completing projects in a timely manner.

I am a municipality, and this sounds like what I am dealing with, so what can I do? Focus your energy on two main things:

1. Elevate your communication both internally with leadership and externally with contractors. Relationships and elevated communication are critical to improving utility safety during elevated roadwork environments like what we are seeing today. Work closely with city leaders and the private companies who will be building to understand what projects are coming as proactively as possible, and reach out to the contractors who are going to be performing the work so you can prepare for what's ahead, as opposed to reacting when it has arrived. Make sure your leadership is aware of the scope of what's coming and spend time educating them on what the workload and resourcing implications of supporting this will need to look like.

2. Leverage data and technology to help. "Just working harder", likely isn't the answer. If your municipality hasn't invested in modern tools to support damage prevention efforts, you are likely to struggle as work scales up. Technology has evolved significantly over the past three decades and there are many tools capable of helping your locate technicians become more efficient and effective at their jobs. These tools can often help you in improving your communications both externally with contractors (enhanced positive response), and internally with your teams as it relates to understanding work and the resourcing needs on a given day or week (reporting tools and data). Educate yourself on what's available to help and bring recommendations forward to leadership with business case documentation to support your investment requests and you can succeed in this challenging environment.

The surge in excavation tied to infrastructure funding presents real challenges—but also real opportunities. Municipalities that communicate proactively and invest in smart tools can improve utility safety, protect critical infrastructure, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

Enforcement as a Catalyst: Advancing Damage Prevention Through Policy Innovation

BY Benjamin Dieker, Executive Director, Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure

Rules and regulations are essential for setting expectations and preventing harm across industries. Yet they only succeed when designed to anticipate emerging challenges and supported by mechanisms that ensure real-world compliance. Damage prevention enforcement is a critical safeguard for the more than 35 million miles of underground infrastructure across the United States. Excavation-related damage threatens essential services – water, electricity, telecommunications – and public safety. Effective enforcement is not just about penalties, but about advancing policy innovation through modern technology, aligned standards, and technology-enabled coordination among stakeholders.

The Role of PHMSA as De Facto National Authority

There is no singular federal authority overseeing all aspects of damage prevention. However, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has assumed this role in practice through its regulatory jurisdiction over pipelines, its creation of the Nine Elements of effective damage prevention programs, and its support of state programs through funding and stakeholder engagement. Though its direct oversight is limited to interstate natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines, PHMSA's influence permeates the broader underground infrastructure landscape.

Pipelines are just a fraction of the nation's buried infrastructure, which also includes electric, water, sewer, telecom facilities, and more. Because PHMSA sets national standards, provides grant funding, and evaluates state-level program adequacy, its interpretations effectively guide damage prevention enforcement nationwide – even in sectors beyond its formal jurisdiction. In practice, PHMSA functions as the nation's central authority on damage prevention, giving it a unique opportunity – and responsibility – to guide industry-wide improvement.

Enforcement Through Oversight and Standard-Setting

PHMSA's enforcement role encompasses more than holding operators accountable under federal law. It also assesses the adequacy of state enforcement programs and can intervene when they fall short. In this way, PHMSA acts as both regulator and evaluator, influencing not just compliance, but also policy direction at the state level.

Yet PHMSA's long-standing reluctance to elevate the standard for what qualifies as "adequate" represents a missed opportunity to drive meaningful progress across state programs. This cautious approach limits its potential to drive reform. By updating its criteria to include modern practices – such as Electronic White Lining (EWL) or Enhanced Positive Response (EPR), which provide detailed and digital documentation to relevant stakeholders – PHMSA can transform enforcement from a compliance exercise into a policy mechanism that accelerates innovation. A stronger adequacy standard would create clear incentives for states to modernize their laws and close critical safety and communication gaps. This approach would elevate standards without imposing new regulatory burdens; instead offering a constructive framework that encourages state-level innovation, reduces damage incidents, and minimizes the need for reactive enforcement.

State Implementation, Grants, and the Patchwork Challenge

While PHMSA provides high-level oversight, enforcement is primarily a state responsibility. States have adopted widely varying statutes and procedures, resulting in an inconsistent national framework. According to Aii's *2024 Damage Prevention Report Card*, most states lack sufficient requirements for foundational practices like white-lining and positive response, with even fewer moving toward innovative technology-based forms of these data-proven best practices. Only one state – Colorado – has mandated Enhanced Positive Response. This inconsistency reveals missed opportunities for coordination and improvement.

This fragmented landscape makes PHMSA's grant programs all the more critical. To strengthen state enforcement,

PHMSA administers the State Damage Prevention (SDP) Grant Program. This initiative provides funding to help states improve the quality and effectiveness of their enforcement efforts, provided they demonstrate comprehensive programs that address all aspects of damage prevention. These grants not only support existing programs – they serve as an incentive for states to adopt forward-looking policies that align with federal standards.

The effectiveness of these grant-supported programs is further enhanced by the adoption of technologies like EWL and EPR, which enable digital records that document each stakeholder's activity throughout the excavation process. These verifiable records not only reduce the likelihood of damage by improving communication and accuracy, but also support more effective enforcement by providing clear, auditable evidence during post-incident investigations.

Modernizing for Impact

Effective enforcement requires more than reactive penalties. It depends on proactive alignment between federal standards, state laws, and technological innovation. By holding states to higher standards through program adequacy reviews and using funding as an incentive, PHMSA can catalyze meaningful improvements. Tools like the 2024 Damage Prevention Report Card provide the roadmap. What's needed now is for both regulators and stakeholders to follow it. By using policy to incentivize innovation and technology adoption, enforcement can shift from reactive penalty to proactive prevention – reducing the need for intervention by minimizing damages before they occur.

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Fred Johnson: A Legacy of Leadership in Mississippi Damage Prevention

The damage prevention community in Mississippi is celebrating a true champion with the announcement of Fred Johnson of Mississippi 811 as the 2025 Q2 Damage Prevention Hero. For many years, Fred has been a cornerstone of the state's efforts to ensure excavation safety and protect vital underground infrastructure. As he has recently celebrated his achievements through retirement, the outpouring of respect and appreciation from colleagues underscores the profound and lasting impact he has had on the industry.

James Keith, Gas Division Operations Manager at TL Wallace Construction, fondly recalls meeting Fred three years ago. "He is the type of person you like as soon as you meet him," Keith shares, emphasizing Fred's immediate warmth and engaging personality. Keith credits Fred with opening his eyes to the critical importance of damage prevention through his invitation to join 811 legislative meetings and participate on a panel as an excavator to help with the dig laws. "He is a great leader and will leave a legacy of knowledge to those he mentored during his tender in the damage prevention industry," Keith adds, lamenting that he hadn't met Fred earlier in his career. He also notes Fred's exceptional ability to connect people, stating, "I also have him to thank for all the wonderful people I have met through him; he keeps great company."

Bill Rutledge, MS Rural Water & Public Works Liaison, who has worked alongside Fred at MS811 for fifteen years, speaks to Fred's unparalleled expertise. "Under the leadership of Fred, [he] was the one to go to for the definition of the dig laws to be exact, not assumed!" Rutledge highlights the personal sacrifices Fred and his brother Sam made for the operation of MS811, concluding emphatically, "I know of no other that is more deserving than Fred Johnson as Damage Prevention Hero. God Bless Him."

Sandy Sanford, Mississippi Damage Prevention Committee Lobbyist, praises Fred's exceptional interpersonal and leadership skills. "Fred has the ideal demeanor and leadership skills to navigate damage prevention challenges," Sanford states. Beyond his extensive knowledge, Fred's ability to listen and develop fair and simple solutions stands out. "Whether dealing with utilities, locators, excavators, local governments, legislators, or others, Fred treats the impacted stakeholder with respect, seeks solutions that are fair and simple, and executes the remedial plan as quickly as possible." Sanford further emphasizes Fred's selfless dedication, noting that he is "solely focused on damage prevention processes and outcomes, and never on personal recognition or accolades."

Jerry Kennemur, MS811 Damage Prevention Coordinator, who has known Fred for over four decades and worked with him for twenty, speaks to his enduring character and deep knowledge. "Fred has always been a man with integrity and high moral character," Kennemur affirms. "With Fred you always knew where you stood and if you needed help, he would be there. I think he could quote the Dig Law by heart and was always willing to help with any issue that might come up." Kennemur also touches on Fred's engaging personality, adding, "Fred has a dry humor about him that you can't help but like."

Fred Johnson's career at Mississippi 811 has been marked by his unwavering commitment to damage prevention, his exceptional leadership qualities, his deep understanding of the dig laws, and his genuine care for the people he works with. As he embarks on retirement, Fred leaves behind a legacy of knowledge, mentorship, and a profound dedication to safety that will continue to benefit the state of Mississippi for years to come. He is a truly deserving recipient of the 2025 Q2 Damage Prevention Hero award.

American Petroleum Institute

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API is now offering assessments for pipeline contractors and service providers to evaluate the health of their current safety management systems (SMS), help mature their safety programs and cultivate a collaborative safety culture between pipeline contractors and operators.

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To learn more visit

API.org/ContractorSafety

Pipeline SMS
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from the desk of ANNETTE BOWMAN

Annette Bowman, Executive Director, Alabama 811

What Makes Enforcement Effective?

Most states have had damage prevention legislation for many years with the challenge that too often the ability to enforce the laws was not included. Alabama's initial legislation was enacted in 1994 with enforcement established under the Attorney General or the local District Attorney. However, no real enforcement actions were conducted over the years. In 2019, a new enforcement program was established with an appointed enforcement board. The enforcement board began to process violation complaints in 2021. Over the last few years, Alabama 811 has continued to educate on how to effectively use the enforcement process. Even though there are more enforcement actions now being processed, would Alabama's enforcement program be considered effective?

This is a question many states are looking to solve. What makes enforcement effective? What is the positive impact of effective enforcement? Are there negative impacts of effective enforcement?

As we continue to process enforcement actions, there are so many elements that must be reviewed to ensure the process is as effective and efficient as it can be. It is a learning experience that the Alabama Underground Damage Prevention Authority (ALUDPA) continues to review to build a solid enforcement program in Alabama.

Celebrating 50 Years of Safety

Alabama 811's Golden Anniversary!

Alabama 811 proudly celebrates 50 years of promoting safety and preventing damage to underground infrastructure! Established in 1975, our journey has been marked by incredible growth, technological advancements, and an unwavering commitment to protecting Alabama's communities.

A Look Back:

1975

The year Alabama's Damage Prevention program was born. Formerly known as the Alabama Line Location Center (ALLC), it was founded by South Central Bell, Alabama Power Company, and Alabama Gas Corporation, initially serving Jefferson and Shelby counties. That first year, over 7,000 locate requests were processed as the program rapidly expanded statewide.

1987

A pivotal moment in our history. Following AT&T's divestiture, South Central Bell transitioned operations to Alabama Gas Corporation. This change set the stage for greater growth and sustainability.

1994

We officially became a nonprofit organization, adopting the name Alabama One Call. This change aligned us with national standards and highlighted our role as a centralized communication hub for safe digging.

2011

In the spirit of national branding and awareness, Alabama One Call rebranded as Alabama 811. This marked a new era of outreach, making "811 before you dig" synonymous with safety.

What's Changed Since 1975

- **Technology:** Back then, locate requests were manually handled. Today, advanced digital platforms make processing requests faster, more efficient, and more reliable than ever.
- **Infrastructure Growth:** From modest beginnings in two counties, to serving the entire state, our network has grown alongside Alabama's booming economy and development.

What Hasn't Changed

- **Our mission:** To enhance communications and coordination among public agencies, utilities, and contractors in order to promote public safety, and prevent damage to underground facilities, by processing timely and efficient notification of excavation.

As we celebrate this golden anniversary, we're not just looking back; we're looking ahead. The next 50 years promise unprecedented growth in infrastructure and technology. Alabama 811's role will be more crucial than ever in ensuring safety and supporting the state's development. Throughout 2025, we'll be hosting events, sharing stories, and highlighting the people and partners who've made Alabama 811 what it is today. Stay tuned for updates and join us as we honor the legacy of Alabama's damage prevention program.

Marking 50 years of service, we extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our success – our members, partners, and the people of Alabama. Together, we've built a legacy of safety, innovation, and community. Here's to the past, present, and future of Alabama 811!

LOCATE REQUESTS PROCESSED

January – December 2024
603,976 – 1% increase from 2023

January - March 2025
148,456 - 6% increase compared to 1st Quarter 2024

Transmissions – Utility Members/Locators

January – December 2024
4,490,392 – 6% decrease from 2023

January - March 2025
1,098,604 - 4% increase compared to 1st Qtr 2024

MEMBERS
As of December 31, 2024: 672

New Members January 2025:
Hotwire Communications
Olin Corporation

COMMON GROUND ALLIANCE (CGA)

Visit ***www.commongroundalliance.com*** for information on damage prevention initiatives from across the U.S., awareness tools and educational materials - just to name a few of the many resources available.

The 2023 Annual DIRT Report and Analysis is now available for download from CGA's website link: ***https://dirt.commongroundalliance.com/.***

The CGA Conference and Expo 2026 is scheduled for April 27-30, 2026 in Colorado Springs, CO. Visit ***www.cgaconference.com*** for more information.

Keeping Your Service Area Updated

Alabama 811's Service Area Editor is a software tool that allows members to view, edit, or download their service area. One of the biggest advantages of this platform is the gap between members and 811 is closed as far as notification areas go. A member's service area is basically the notation of a geographical area of their overall facilities and helps determine when they are notified for excavation activities.

In the past, members would submit their service area updates to our GIS team, usually through email or FTP upload, and our staff would conduct any geoprocessing needed to create the final product suitable to load into our service area database for that member. This geoprocessing could include reprojecting, buffering, clipping, and a whole host of other geoprocessing tools. Once the geoprocessing was completed, the update would be uploaded into our system and the new service area updates were active. There was no interface for members to go and see exactly what their service area really looked like when everything was processed and completed.

This gap from initial data submit to final product could create problems and misunderstandings. For example, a member might submit a shapefile of their underground lines and ask for a 500' buffer - but without seeing how that buffer appears on a map, it was hard to know exactly what that covers. Not to mention, as new lines are added there was no easy way for a member to log in to view exactly what was already covered.

This gap led to confusion, prompting many members to ask why they weren't getting tickets in areas they thought were covered - or conversely it led to members assuming they were covered in areas where they really weren't. Neither situation was good, and a solution was needed.

Our service area editor is designed with user friendliness in mind. You don't have to have any background knowledge on GIS to use it, but if you happen to be a GIS person you will find the functionality of the editor to be easy and effective.

Permissions
Different users have different needs, which is why we have both viewer and editor accounts on the service area editor. This is ideal for members who have some employees who need or want access to view their area any time, but leaves the actual editing up to one or two people.

Permissions can be changed anytime. Editors can use all the features we offer with the editor, while viewers can only view and download their areas.

Editing
Editors have access to the full suite of tools associated with the service area editor. The tools range from very basic, draw in features, to uploading your own GIS files that the editor can automatically buffer.

On the easier end of the spectrum there are draw in features on the editor. This includes a basic line tool & a polygon tool. The line tool has a buffer automatically applied once you finish drawing. The process is extremely easy and ideal for users who have little to no GIS experience. The default buffer size can be changed upon request. Similar to the line tool, the polygon tool allows you to draw polygons directly on the map. Another great choice for those with little experience in GIS. No additional buffer is applied to the polygons drawn on the map.

The drawing tools can also be used to remove areas from the map, again lending an easy choice for service area editing to those with little experience in the field.

For users more familiar with GIS who have their own datasets, we also have the addition tool & full replacement tool. These allow you to plug in your own data directly to the editor, allowing for a seamless transition from your GIS to our service area editor.

The addition tool allows you to upload data as an addition to whatever is currently a part of your service area. Many users like this tool because they have a complete dataset that is their service area that they add to over time. Rather than exporting the new additions as a separate layer, they can simply upload the whole thing as an addition without fear of anything being left off.

The full replacement tool, as the name suggests, is for those who need to completely replace their existing area. When using this tool, anything that is uploaded will become the new area and anything left off will be dropped from coverage. This is a valuable tool for cleaning up ever changing datasets but should be used with caution.

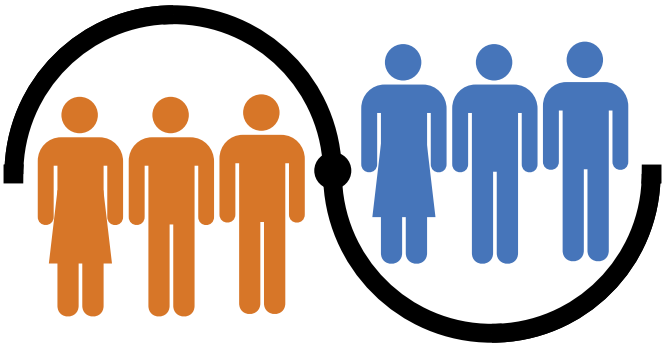
To easily see what has been added or what has been left off, the editor also has a "show published" tool. Checking that box simply highlights your current area in yellow allowing you to check your work quickly and easily.

Publishing Your Area
Our editor is built around safety and ensuring that areas cannot be drastically changed on accident. When you submit an edit, it comes to us for approval. This process is to ensure we have a chance to check for any unusual changes before the update is pushed into production. As an example, if we see a major reduction in your area that seems accidental, we will reach out to confirm whether it is correct before the update goes into production.

If nothing looks out of place, we will approve your edits. Once the edits are approved, they will go live when we publish our next service area version. These updates typically go live on Thursday mornings, but they can be done any time upon request if a member needs an update to go live sooner.

We are extremely excited to have the new service area editor up and running. Over the last year we have transitioned dozens of frequently updating users onto the platform with success. Members who are interested in signing up for the editor should contact Derek Day at ***dday@al811.com.***

The service area manager is just one of the new technologies that are continuously being developed and being implemented with Alabama 811's operations to keep a quality service in place for both our members and the excavating community.



Membership Meetings Building Relationships

Over the last three years, Alabama 811 has added Damage Prevention Coordinator positions to allow for more direct interaction and support for our members and those using the services of the 811 system. We have three Damage Prevention Coordinators who have been assigned to regional areas of the state.

The initial focus of our Damage Prevention Coordinator position was to conduct member visits. The intent of these meetings is to have face-to-face meeting with members to review their contact information, positive response usage, enforcement procedures, educational functions, etc. These member visits have been very productive to build even stronger relationships with our members. We want to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our members, supporting their in-house damage prevention programs and supporting issues they may have in the field.

Over these three years there have been over 700 visits for both members and non-members. Moving forward, the plan is to meet with at least 35% of our members annually.

Meet Our Damage Prevention Coordinators

Kara Jones Woods, North Alabama

Jeff Bice, Central Alabama

Kim Covan, South Alabama

NEWSLINE

WEBSITE

Visit Alabama 811's website ***(www.al811.com)*** for information and helpful tools.

- **Excavator Training:** A free online excavator training tool is available. Visit ***https://al811.com/excavator-training/*** for more information.
- **Children's educational games:** Free games to educate early on the need for safe digging knowledge. Visit ***https://al811.com/kids-safe-digging/*** to see how much you know!

ONLINE AND MOBILE APPLICATIONS FOR LOCATE REQUESTS … There is an option for "calling" in a locate request that doesn't require you to actually call Alabama 811. Locate requests can be processed online via the web portal by visiting Alabama 811's website at www.al811.com. Visit our website for additional information and training tools.

ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

The underground damage prevention enforcement process became official as of November 2020. Information on how the process works and Enforcement Authority determinations can be found at the Underground Damage Prevention Authority website – ***www.aludpa.org.***

ALABAMA DAMAGE PREVENTION SUMMIT

September 9-11, 2025
The Lodge at Gulf State Park
Gulf Shores

DAMAGE PREVENTION INDUSTRY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Global Damage Prevention Summit is scheduled for September 16-18, 2025, in Dallas, TX. Visit https://actsnowinc.com/globaldps for more information.

DON'T ignore me.

What? You don't think that you should pay attention to a little yellow flag? Well, I'm the best thing to keep your crew safe. Call 811 before digging, and Atmos Energy will plant me and my pals wherever natural gas lines are buried. Trust me, you'd rather have us get your attention than a natural gas line.

811®
Know what's **below.**
Call before you dig.

ATMOS energy®

from the desk of BRENT SALTZMAN

Brent Saltzman, Executive Director, Louisiana 811

We are off to another incredibly busy season of excavation activity within our beautiful state. Our field liaisons under the leadership of Billy Forest, Manager-Damage Prevention, have worked tirelessly to help prevent underground utility damage amidst all the chaos, and we are happy to assist whenever and wherever possible.

Providing damage prevention presentations, answering Dig Law questions, and coordinating activities are just a few of the vitally important roles our folks provide. Best of all, this is at no cost to our stakeholders!

As of this writing, we are once again proposing legislation to make our Dig Law even better. I encourage you to read the following pages and check out what is being proposed and how it will impact you! We cannot thank the author of our proposed legislation enough - State Representative, Vincent, "Vinny" St. Blanc, who has for many years supported our efforts with various bills. His commitment to damage prevention should be acknowledged and recognized so I encourage you to thank him for his unwavering contributions to our industry.

By the time this article is published, we will have concluded another highly successful Safe Digging Month in April. We have had numerous opportunities to speak on the subject through various news outlets including radio and television stations across the state. We ALWAYS appreciate these occasions to communicate to our communities on the importance of contacting us before digging to avoid damages and save lives. During April, we also partnered with several members by setting up tents and handing out 811 promotional items at various home improvement stores and nurseries across our region. Additionally, educational literature was distributed along with providing free snow cones! Interacting and educating the public is what we do, and we value the relationships with our members in supporting these endeavors.

Please follow us on social media to find out where we will be next and how to get involved. Utilize the resources you have with us because we are here to help.

Thank you for your continued support in making Louisiana safe for all. God bless you!

Why is Enforcement of the Dig Law Important?

Many years ago, Louisiana did not have much, if any, enforcement of the Louisiana Underground Utilities and Facilities Damage Prevention Law (Dig Law). It made it extremely difficult at Louisiana 811 to respond to our stakeholders (members and excavators) when they were confronted with a situation where one party was not abiding by the law. We had to reaffirm that we were not the enforcement agency, therefore, could not cite anyone or impose any corrective action.

Around 2016, PHMSA (the Federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration) looked at each state's enforcement efforts. For those states that had inadequate enforcement, PHMSA mandated that either the state addressed this issue, or they would get involved in enforcement. Our state government reacted and in June 2017, Governor John Bel Edwards signed legislation granting authority to the Commissioner of Conservation to enforce Louisiana's Dig Law on regulated pipeline rights-of-way. These are pipelines that carry any gas that is flammable, corrosive, or toxic (most are natural gas pipelines) and liquids lines that carry petroleum, petroleum products, anhydrous ammonia and liquid CO2. Their enforcement program, initially, would be a complaint-based program.

When this became law, things changed for the better for our industry. We now had, and continue to have, an agency who will hold the "bad players" accountable, making Louisiana safer. Under the leadership of Interim Commissioner, Steven Giambrone, this organization has made a significant impact on damage prevention.

Interim Commissioner Giambrone's group today has several agents proactively patrolling our state and oftentimes will stop by an excavation site where pipelines are present to make sure excavators have a valid dig ticket and abiding by the law. They have the authority to issue citations and often do but their primary goal is to protect the public, the environment, and the pipelines used to transport valuable resources. Warning statements are often issued to first-time offenders requiring Louisiana 811 training – either online or in-person.

What is equally impressive about this agency is that they do not discriminate when it comes to issuing citations. They hold the pipeline industry accountable for Dig Law violations such as not responding to a locate request on mismarking a pipeline.

Yes, the Dig Law has provisions for non-pipeline related incidents and MAY be enforced by local law enforcement or the State Police, but we have seen that these agencies are not as apt to respond to violators. Having enforcement across the board would be great and perhaps Louisiana will have this at some point in the future, but enforcement has proven to lead to less damage and makes a difference.

The next time you see a potential violation of the Dig Law around a pipeline, complaints concerning damages to pipelines, excavating without an 811 ticket, unsafe digging practices, mismarking or no marks, those can be submitted to *PipelineInspectors@la.gov.* According to Interim Commissioner Giambrone, "The more information you provide, the better our enforcement can be. For these types of complaints, we will try to send an agent out to the site." Interim Commissioner Giambrone's office can be reached toll free at (833) 726-0410.

Excavation Training Online

These FREE Excavator Training and Education opportunities are highly recommended, whether working on land or in a body of water. Both are available in English & Spanish!

Municipality Benefits of Membership of Louisiana 811

By Brent Saltzman, President, Louisiana 811

To the municipalities and parish governments who own or operate underground utilities who are not current members of Louisiana 811, we would like to share with you some valuable information about our non-profit organization and the potential benefits of membership. This is especially important today in our damage prevention efforts.

With so much broadband work around the great state of Louisiana, it can be extremely difficult to navigate and comprehend where internet service providers (ISP's) will be installing fiber optic cable. ConnectLA has an excellent website to help understand the "when" and "where" but there is so much more involved for municipalities and parish governments.

You folks who own/operate underground infrastructure in these areas have a multitude of issues to navigate through before, during, and after the construction phase; especially in light that most of the fiber optic cable will be buried. This is where having a resource like Louisiana 811 can help.

Membership in Louisiana 811 is certainly not a cure all when addressing the complexities of massive projects like GUMBO 1.0 and 2.0 but it can have its advantages. For instance, who else has the resources that can assist as the liaison between the contractors (folks installing the fiber optic cable) and the owner/operators of underground utilities? Louisiana 811 has field personnel who know of vitally important meetings (such as utility coordinating councils) whereby information is exchanged before construction commences. The field personnel can also assist in setting up meetings during the project and help resolve misunderstandings between the parties. Furthermore, we can provide key information for enforcement personnel who proactively look for violators of the Louisiana Underground Utilities & Facilities Damage Prevention Law commonly referred to as the Dig Law.

As a member of Louisiana 811, you will be assured to receive notice prior to the underground utility construction assuming the ISP contractor is abiding by the law. Currently, non-members must rely on the excavator to reach out to you directly before digging. The assumption is that the excavator will contact you! Oftentimes, these ISP's utilize out-of-state contractors who may not be aware that Louisiana does not have "unified" membership, meaning every underground utility operator is a member of Louisiana 811. When this happens, and it often does, the municipality or parish government has no idea that excavation will be occurring in their area.

We also understand that many municipalities either lack detailed maps indicating the exact location of their underground assets and/or do not have the personnel to physically locate their facilities. It can be extremely frustrating managing these large projects. Although Louisiana cannot assist with these issues, we can provide some insights into possible remedies.

History has proven that Louisiana 811 members have benefited over the years leaning on and utilizing us as a resource. We have been in business since the late 1970's and we have, and will continue to be, the voice of our members.

In closing, our intent is not to sell anyone on the value of membership in Louisiana 811…that is for you to decide. We are merely pointing out that membership has its benefits, and we want to be a resource for you. Signing up to be a member is easy and we are proud that we have one of the lowest costs per ticket in the nation (currently $0.80 per ticket) plus a very reasonable annual fee ($100 per member code). We notify you, the member, of excavation in your area based on your defined service area and it can be refined at any time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me *(brent@louisiana811.com)* should you have any questions. I would be more than happy to discuss further how we operate, and the minimal cost associated with membership. I can also put you in contact with some of our existing municipal members so you can hear first-hand why they became members and the all-important results.

Proposed Legislation in Louisiana

The proposed legislation (HB 392) for this legislative session in Louisiana is available using the QR code. Listed below are the bullet points of what this entails:

- Defines Manual Probing
- Clarifies the "120-Hour" rule whereby excavation should begin within 120 hours of the mark-by time
- Requires proof of completion of training and education provided by the Regional Notification Center
- Provides further clarification related to the Large Project Excavation & Demolition process (mutual agreement by ALL parties and area of excavation must be contiguous).

HLS 25RS-848

2025 Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 392

BY REPRESENTATIVE ST. BLANC

ORIGINAL

Prefiled pursuant to Article III, Section 2(A) of the Constitution of Louisiana.

UTILITIES: Provides relative to the Louisiana Underground Utilities and Facilities Damage Prevention Law

2

To amend and reenact R.S. 40:1749.13(B)(1) and (6) and (E)(1) and

AN ACT

Scan here to see the entire bill.

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Know What's Below – CALL 811 Before You Dig

Whether you're:

- Putting up a fence
- Planting trees
- Installing a pool or playground

Digging without knowing what's underground is dangerous. Calling 811 ensures utilities will come out and mark underground lines.

Why Pipelines Matter
Pipelines safely and efficiently deliver products that:

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Pipelines Are Safe, But Not Risk-Free

If You See Something, Say Something!

Report suspicious activity near pipelines. If you suspect a gas or oil leak, call local authorities first then contact **Third Coast at 1-800-926-4352**

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Call 811 before you dig

Your safety is our number one priority.

From installing a new pool to simply planting a tree, digging without knowing what's beneath the surface can be extremely dangerous. You could also disrupt utility services to your neighborhood, leading to expensive repairs and fines.

When you call 811, all utilities, including Entergy, will respond within two business days to locate and mark the underground utility lines. (The two business days start the morning after you call).

And if you suspect a gas leak, leave the area immediately and call **1-800-ENTERGY** (368-3749) or **911**. Indications of a gas leak include the distinctive smell of natural gas, a whistling or hissing sound near a gas appliance, or dead vegetation and bubbles near a gas line.

We power life.℠

A message from Entergy New Orleans, LLC and Entergy Louisiana, LLC
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from the desk of MIKE MORGAN

Mike Morgan, President, Mississippi 811

A special thanks to those of you who have worked with the Mississippi Damage Prevention Committee (MDPC). Much of the legislative success we've experienced is the result of your willingness to work through difficult issues, your feedback, and your commitment to finding the common ground necessary to take a unanimous draft proposal to our legislature through our lobbyist, Sandy Sanford.

2025 has started off at a fast pace and has picked up speed along the way. The Mississippi Legislature passed all proposed legislation submitted by the MDPC. To take a closer look at HB1191, click on the QR code found on page 25.

I would like to focus for a moment on just one of the topics addressed in HB1191. It is the highly discussed issue of how best to handle a large project. This is a topic being discussed across the country and over the past couple of years in Mississippi. Honestly, we were unable to adequately define what a large project is. We were also unable to determine the best process for managing the project.

The MDPC agreed to include the concept of managing large projects in our dig law. But rather try to enforce compliance on something that our stakeholders weren't able to agree upon, we agreed to make it voluntary to learn more about what would work best for Mississippi.

We were fortunate in that we were able to turn the notes from our meetings to our very own Amanda Russell. From these notes and much discussion about the process, she outlined a basis and a timeline for the large project ticket in Mississippi, and we determined this would be the starting point for case studies throughout the next couple of years. The voluntary large project ticket goes into effect on July 1, 2025, as does HB1191. As it relates to the large project ticket, we've agreed to set up a monthly meeting within the MDPC to discuss lessons learned from those instances where the large project process is utilized across the state.

The first meeting was to take place in May to familiarize our committee with the basic plan and to learn how to evaluate the process once it goes into effect. In the spirit of transparency, it is our intention to share with our stakeholders in Mississippi what we learn to gain additional feedback to prepare us for the time when a large project process is mandatory in Mississippi.

Finally, let me encourage all of you to continue to work together to make Mississippi a safer place to live and work!

Meet Cole Fesmire

Vice President and Director of Operations, Mississippi 811

We want to take a moment to introduce Cole Fesmire to the stakeholders in Mississippi. He is no stranger to Mississippi 811 and certainly not a stranger to damage prevention. He served on the Mississippi 811 Board of Directors and has been a fixture in the Mississippi Damage Prevention Committee (MDPC) for a number of years, especially the past 3 years, serving as co-chair for the group.

Prior to assuming the role of Vice President, Cole worked for the City of Olive Branch for 20 years. The city was recognized as one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. During that time, he was instrumental in budgeting and staffing for the Public Works Department as well as budgeting for the many capital improvements needed in the city to keep up with the growth. He completed his time with the City of Olive Branch as the Public Works Director. As such, he was responsible for overseeing the water, sewer, gas, street, and sanitation departments.

Just one of his favorite sayings is "Communication is the key to all great things." When you bring a challenge to Cole, you will notice that he knows the value of listening to understand your issue. If communication is the key, he'll convince you that listening is the key to communication.

When asked why he was interested in changing his location and why would he go to work for Mississippi 811, Cole said, "Working for Mississippi 811 has been a long-held dream of mine. Over the years I have developed a strong passion for damage prevention, especially while serving on the MDPC and as a Mississippi 811 board member. Through these experiences, I've come to appreciate how important the work of Mississippi 811 is and just how great the organization is. That's because of past leadership and how the employees have been empowered to serve the membership. They are not only helpful but deeply dedicated to their roles that keeps Mississippi a safer place to live and work."

Cole's first day in his new role was January 6 of this year, and what do you think his biggest surprise has been? His response, "The amount of people that do not know what 811 is but know what 'call before you dig' is."

If you get a chance, stop by or give Cole a call and welcome him to his new role!

National Safe Digging Month Inspires New Event at Safety City

By Cole Fesmire, Vice President, Mississippi 811

On April 3, in recognition of National Safe Digging Month, Mississippi 811 partnered with the Mississippi Underground Facilities Damage Prevention Board (MUFDPB), Kinder Morgan, Atmos Energy, and Vermeer MidSouth to provide a free day of locator and damage investigation training for all stakeholders across the state. Additionally, Vermeer MidSouth demonstrated how to safely vacuum excavate buried utilities. Simultaneously, a successful blood drive was hosted by Mississippi 811 on site.

Participants from across the state engaged in hands-on training, learning various techniques to enhance their skills in locating and investigating damages. Attendees included representatives from numerous utility companies and municipalities, making it an excellent occasion for both training and networking among utility representatives, excavators, and locators.

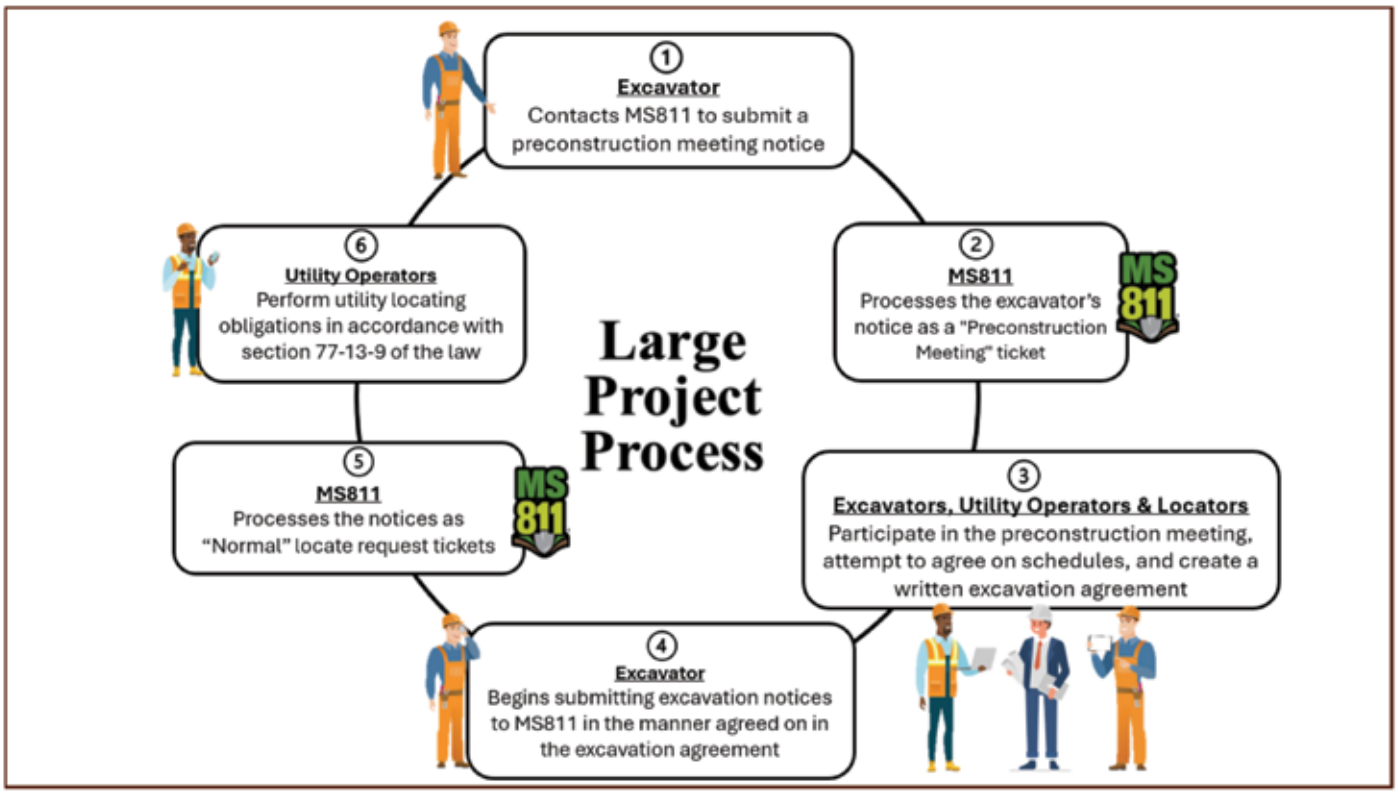
As the first annual event, it is set to grow over the years, fostering new training opportunities, relationships, and communication. The significance of Safe Digging Month lies in raising awareness, encouraging engagement, providing training, facilitating collaboration among stakeholders, and promoting technologies like hydro excavation. All these elements were integral to the training provided at this year's event.

Plans are already underway for expanding next year's event at Safety City. Hope to see you there. Until then, remember to call 811 and then safe digging!

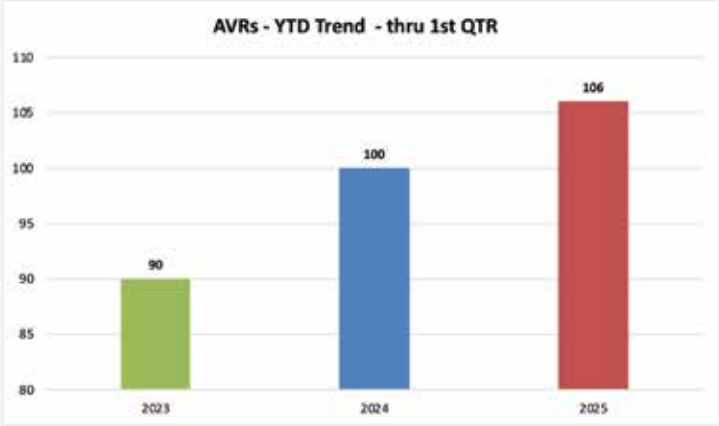
Large Project Excavations

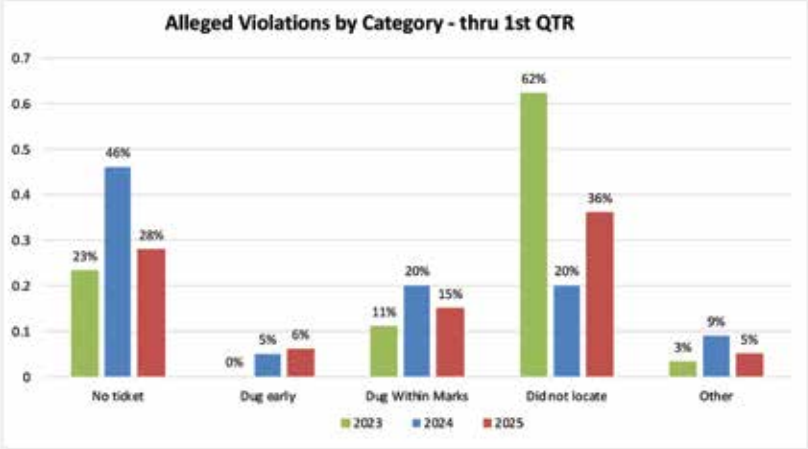
A voluntary process has been introduced for large, complex excavation projects, where excavators, utilities, and locators may collaborate in a preconstruction meeting to align excavation and locating schedules before submitting locate request tickets. This aims to reduce repeated and unnecessary locates by enabling utilities to mark only areas where excavators will be digging at specified times. The diagram below shows the cycle of the Large Project process.

This is the start of a great outcome for this topic and we look forward to building with our members something that is worthy of presenting to our legislative body for future law enhancements.



Mississippi Enforcement Statistics





To view the complete 1st quarter comparative statistics, scan here:

The 2025 legislative session concluded with Governor Reeves signing HB1191 into law effective July 1, 2025. Thank you to all the chairs and members of the MDPC for the time and work dedicated to making Mississippi a safer place to live and work.

The amended dig law included:

- Longer Ticket Life
- Electronic White Lining
- Tolerance Zone Clarification
- Emergency Excavation Locate Time
- Large Project Excavation (voluntary)
- Submerged Excavation Requirements
- Extension of Locate Date by Agreement of Excavator and Utility Locator
- Secured Electric Generation Facility Exception (Cooperative Energy of MS legislation)

To view HB1191 in its entirely, scan here.

Committed to safe digging in Mississippi

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from the desk of BILL TURNER

William "Bill" Turner, President, Tennessee 811

We just completed our annual Damage Prevention Summit in Franklin, and I'm happy to report that our annual membership meeting – conducted during the Summit – had record attendance.

For those who missed this year's event, the Summit kicked off with guest speaker Chris Czarnik's talk about "Winning the War for Talent". Chris is a gifted speaker and did a great job explaining the ins and outs of today's workforce challenges, plus concepts and tactics that we can all use to attract the right people into our organizations. After Chris and the annual meeting, the sessions shifted focus to damage prevention challenges impacting the state, from broadband expansion to the legislative priorities of our stakeholders.

I would like to take this opportunity to focus on key takeaways from the two-part legislative roundtable. The first hour of the session was to discuss past legislative changes; what changes have been made and what has been the impact on damage prevention as a result of those changes? The second session was to discuss the future legislative changes; what changes are necessary to improve our damage prevention efforts in the future?

Past changes:

- Effective enforcement and the creation of a 17-member enforcement board – all agreed that this has made Tennessee better, however, there are still concerns that enforcement is not balanced, due to complaints mostly only being filed against excavators.
- Damage reporting and damage notices – everyone agreed that damage data is key to targeting our efforts and measuring success, but the limited data we are currently able to collect paints an incomplete picture.
- Hand digging clause – only property owners digging on their property and operators working on their own facilities are exempt from calling when hand digging no more than 12 inches deep. Prior to this change, hand digging did not require a locate request, therefore, everyone agreed that this is better than what we had previously.
- Increased civil penalties and the opportunity to mitigate a penalty with training – mostly everyone agrees with the changes, but some violators would rather pay the penalty than go through training, meaning they are not better equipped to avoid future violations.

Future objectives:

- White paint (or electronic white lining) for proposed excavation area – there seems to be a consensus that exemptions to the current requirement for white lining are too broad, and exemptions should only exist for nonprofessional groups, like homeowners. A requirement to mark an additional buffer area beyond the white markings would allow excavators room to adjust their route when markings reveal conflicts.
- Untonable facilities – when an underground facility is untonable, it may be necessary to allow the utility operator additional time to locate the facilities prior to excavation.
- Weather related delays – the current law does not allow an operator to delay the locating responsibility due to weather or extenuating circumstances. It was suggested that a provision be included to allow this.
- Mandatory damage reporting – while damage reporting through DIRT (for utility operators) and damage notices (for excavators) is required, neither have good usage rates. The suggestion is to clarify the requirement and improve enforcement of this provision of the law.

Unfortunately, an hour timeslot only allows us to skim the surface of how we can improve the law in our state, but the discussion added depth and context to the ideas we've been considering for 2026. We'll continue to update stakeholders as we work to prepare for the next amendment.

If you were able to join us for the Summit, or even just the annual meeting, we really appreciate your time and participation. Whether you were able to attend or not, I'd like to thank you for your daily efforts to make Tennessee a safer place.

Damage Prevention MVP: Clarksville Gas & Water

By Jason Fryer, Damage Prevention Liaison, Tennessee 811

Did you know that there's a grant program in our state that uses penalty money collected from individuals or companies who are found in violation of the "Dig Law"? Here's a quick refresher: a violator can be ordered to pay a monetary penalty (a fine). The money goes into something called the "Damage Prevention Fund", and the Underground Utility Damage Enforcement Board (UUDEB) has an annual window of time where stakeholders can submit a grant proposal for up to $40,000 of the money.

In 2024, Clarksville Gas & Water (CGW) was awarded a grant for awareness and education efforts after submitting a successful proposal to the UUDEB. They received the full grant amount and used it to fund the inaugural issue of a customer-facing magazine called *The Service Line*. I sat down with CGW Marketing Coordinator, Rhonda Fulton, and Assistant Gas Department Manager, Tyler Hayes, to learn more about their initiative.

Left to right: Tyler Hayes, Rhonda Fulton, Carlye Sommers

CGW first became aware of the grant through their grants analyst, who completed the three-page, short answer, grant application available on the Tennessee Public Utility Commission's website. Discussions were already underway about publishing a new customer magazine, but they were thrilled to learn of the approval of the grant to support this significant undertaking. Rhonda coordinated the assembly and

Scan here for the entire article

Frequency Matters: The Locate Equation

By Dean Anderson, Damage Prevention Liaison, East Tennessee,Tennessee 811

In previous articles, I explored what makes a utility locate not just good, but meaningful and accurate - a true recipe for success. Like any good recipe, a successful locate includes key ingredients:

- Safety protocols
- Locate request review
- Site assessment
- Complete records review
- Performing the locate
- Print and utility verification
- Site restoration
- Double-checking scope
- Thorough documentation

Skip one of these steps, and you might still end up with a result—but much like a recipe missing a key ingredient, the final outcome could leave you with a bitter taste.

We continued with the question of, "Are you well grounded?" In that article, a fair amount of time was spent on understanding the best practices centered on the proper grounding of a utility, combined with the placement of the grounding rod, and factoring in the electromagnetic field distortions in the soil.

So, we have the recipe, and we get that grounding is important, but is that it? Not quite, now we need to talk about frequency.

Grounding + Frequency = Accuracy

The frequency is transmitted onto the utility and is always seeking a return path through the soil. A factor influencing the success and accuracy of the locate, and one that can be easily overlooked...

Scan here for the entire article

Decoding Positive Response

By Craig Ingram, Vice President of Operations, Tennessee 811

In Tennessee, utility operators are required to respond to all locate requests (including design tickets) using the web-based electronic positive response system. This gives the excavator (or requestor) a definitive answer to the status of their ticket and becomes part of the official record. So, positive response is a key element of communication between excavators and utility operators, and that means it has the power to improve the 811 process or to introduce confusion.

If you're reading this and you're not sure what I'm talking about, here's the definition found in the Common Ground Alliance (CGA)'s Best Practices Guide:

"Positive Response: Communication with the excavator prior to excavation to ensure that all contacted (typically via the 811 centers) owner/operators have located their underground facilities and have appropriately marked any potential conflicts with the areas of planned excavation."

A large number of response code options could mean that you can provide a more detailed response on how a specific job site was handled, but it could also lead to several codes with similarities, making it hard to distinguish the best use case for each. On the other hand, our current approach of only using nine codes may be insufficient to cover the variety of possibilities that exist in the real world. A limited number of responses may also be insufficient to communicate the action taken on design tickets or other specialized notice types.

Many states with electronic positive response also include a comments box that can be used to provide additional details that were not adequately communicated through the selected response code. In Tennessee, we find that the field is underutilized, and free-form fields are also difficult to pull analytics from.

We're preparing to launch a task force that will formally evaluate the current options and begin the collaborative process of adding, removing, or rephrasing response codes to better facilitate communications between locators and excavators while also allowing for better data collection on the successes and failures of the 811 process. The end goal is for positive response to accommodate attachments (images, pdf files, etc.) and for it to become a two-way communication tool that allows excavators to respond.

In the meantime, here's a list of our current response codes and a short explanation of the intended use for each one.

Code: 01 - No Response - No Timely Response From The Utility - System Closed Ticket
Intended Use: Posted automatically by the positive response platform when a utility does not respond to a ticket before it expires. Utilities are not able to post responses on expired tickets.

Code: 02 – Located - Facilities Marked
Intended Use: All underground lines for the specified member and facility type(s) have been located and marked in the area of excavation described on the ticket.

Code: 03 – Clear - No Conflict
Intended Use: The area of excavation is inside the specified member's service area, but the member does not have underground lines in conflict with the scope of work on the ticket.

Code: 04 - In Conflict - Utility representative must be on site during excavation
Intended Use: All underground lines for the specified member and facility type(s) have been located and marked in the area of excavation described on the ticket. The marked lines are high profile or otherwise require additional protection, so the utility operator needs to be on site to supervise the work.

Code: 05 - Locate Delayed
Intended Use: Markings will not be completed on time due to circumstances beyond the control of the utility or their locator. Additional info explaining the delay and ETA for markings is included in the comments. Followed by a closing response as soon as possible.

Code: 06 - Cannot Locate - Contact Utility
Intended Use: The member utility has attempted to locate and mark the specified facility type(s) but is unable to because of access issues, damaged tracer, etc. Contact information is provided in the comments.

Code: 07 - Located to Meter Only - Private property beyond meter not located
Intended Use: All underground lines owned and maintained by the specified member have been located and marked in the area of excavation described on the ticket, but private lines extend beyond a meter or other point of service.

Code: 08 - Utility Generated Ticket Self-Locate
Intended Use: The ticket was entered by the responding utility or by their 2nd party contractor. Any markings needed on the site will be coordinated internally with utility staff and/or their contractor.

Code: 09 - No Marking Needed - Dig site outside of utility service area or ticket has been cancelled
Intended Use: The area of excavation is outside the service area of the specified member utility. Typically occurs around the edge of a member's database. More likely when a member's database is based on grids rather than shape files.

Learn more about using Tennessee's electronic positive response platform on our site: https://www.tenn811.com/positive-response

In the Middle

By Marcus Bartholomew, Damage Prevention Liaison, Tennessee 811

The job of a Damage Prevention Liaison covers a wide range of duties. I would describe it as a mix of customer service, outreach, marketing, and education.

We often get calls from the public from people wanting to file a complaint against a utility, utility contractor, excavator, or homeowner for alleged violations of Tennessee's Underground Utility Damage Prevention Act (or "Dig Law"). A common call is someone wishing to report excavation work in an area where a One Call ticket has not been requested and underground utilities have not been located.

It is a common misconception that 811 is the organization that processes and investigates enforcement complaints, but Tennessee 811 is neither an investigative agency nor a regulatory arm of state government. So, in these situations, we often find ourselves brought into the middle of an issue between a complainant and an alleged violator. Because we try to keep a neutral position between all the stakeholders we serve, our assistance usually comes in the form of answering "best practice" questions or directing people to the appropriate "Dig Law" sections and the Tennessee Public Utility Commission (TPUC) website for information on how to file a complaint.

Sometimes, even though we aren't officially "investigators", we get situations where a bit of investigation is needed to figure out what an issue is and how to best help the person asking for our assistance.

Recently, a homeowner contacted us wishing to file a complaint against a utility contractor that she had seen on her street. The homeowner explained that she worked from her residence and her livelihood depended on maintaining a high-speed internet connection in her home office. Her fear, based on a neighbor's experience of suffering a damaged fiber utility a few weeks earlier, was that the trucks and equipment she had seen on the side of the road a few blocks away would perform excavation that could potentially cause damage and leave her without internet service. The homeowner had previously worked for an engineering firm and knew about 811 and the One Call system. When she did not see colored paint or flags on the ground in the area, she approached the workers and asked if they had called 811 to get the utilities marked. When the workers on scene told her they were not sure, she called 811 to see if there was a valid One Call ticket in the area.

Upon learning there was no active locate ticket on her street, she wanted to file a complaint against the contractor. Because the homeowner lived in one of the Tennessee counties in my Damage Prevention region, this is where I came in. I provided the homeowner with the online resources and information we normally provide for this request, but she revealed that she did not know the name of the company doing the work. She had only seen the company logo and some initials on the side of a truck. I asked her to let me look into it before she started the complaint process.

Using a number of public sources, I was able to identify the company as a utility subcontractor based out of state. I checked our One Call system for any other tickets involving the contractor and was able to get a good direct phone number to their corporate office, which led to them providing me with a cell phone number for a regional supervisor who was overseeing this project. After talking to the supervisor, he told me that their work in the area only consisted of inserting conduit into existing underground vaults and that there was no excavation or excavating equipment on site. He assured me the only equipment in the neighborhood would be pick-up trucks towing large spools of conduit. They had not called in a One Call ticket because no excavation would be taking place.

By this time, the homeowner had gone back out and took several photos of the crew and equipment and emailed them to me, which confirmed everything the supervisor had said. After reviewing everything with her, she was satisfied that her utilities would be safe and that pursuing a complaint would not be appropriate.

A happy ending? Yes. Not only is it great to know more homeowners are becoming educated about the importance of the One Call system, but this incident also let a major contractor know that as well! I would like to think I was able to save someone from filing an online complaint and the contractor from potentially having to respond to one. I made some good contacts and was able to provide some education on our process and clarify some of our state requirements to both sides.

Operational Numbers

Call Center Stats
Incoming (Q1)
2023: 247,407
2024: 255,717

Outgoing (Q1)
2023:1,276,557
2024:1,301,053

Call Ratio (O/I)
2023: 5.16
2024: 5.09

Avg Daily Tickets (Q1-Q4)
2023: 2,748
2024: 2,814

New Members (Q1)
Columbia Public Works, City of
Meta Platforms, Inc.
Preferred Ventures, LLC
Scott County Telephone Cooperative

How One City Created a Process to Reduce Damage to Their Underground Utilities

BY JOHNNY LUNSFORD, OPERATIONS MANAGER, ROGERS WATER UTILITIES

In 2019 as a utility provider, we recognized a significant problem emerging in our service area. Unfortunately, many of these issues were caused by utility boring companies damaging our underground water and sewer infrastructure - critical services upon which our customers rely. Consequently, we needed to develop a solution to address this disruptive problem before it got bigger. The solution needed to address the immediate issue while also minimizing potential future harm to our infrastructure.

We conducted a comprehensive review to clearly and thoroughly describe the damages that had been caused. The comprehensive review revealed the problematic practices of utility boring companies were a primary cause of the issues, but it also revealed the issues were not solely caused by the utility bore companies.

Scan for the entire article

from the desk of CHRIS STOVALL

Chris Stovall, President & CEO, Texas811

As we approach the midpoint of 2025, I want to take a moment to reflect on Texas811's progress and provide an update on the state of the organization. I am pleased to report that we are in a strong position with several key initiatives advancing successfully. Our technology roadmap remains a top priority. The development of our new state-of-the-art mobile app is progressing well. This next-generation platform is designed to enhance the user experience, streamline ticket submission, and offer new tools that make damage prevention simpler and more intuitive for all stakeholders. We are currently in advanced testing and remain on schedule for release later this year.

One of the most exciting achievements this year has been the successful implementation of our fiber optic sensing program. This cutting-edge technology is already delivering value by providing real-time monitoring and improving situational awareness along critical infrastructure corridors. Early results indicate meaningful gains in safety and operational efficiency, and we look forward to expanding its deployment in partnership with our members.

Our new contact center enhancements, powered by AWS, are currently in the planning phase. This initiative focuses on bringing greater reliability, scalability, and performance to our operations. Once implemented, these enhancements will enable us to optimize call handling and deliver an improved support experience for callers and excavators across Texas.

We are excited to announce the upcoming Texas811 Dig Clinic. This innovative space will feature excavator and locator simulators, providing hands-on training and education opportunities for industry professionals and the public. The Dig Clinic is scheduled to open later this year and will serve as a vital resource for promoting best practices and enhancing safety awareness in damage prevention.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to each of you for your ongoing support. Texas811 remains committed to being an industry leader in damage prevention and technology innovation, and none of this would be possible without your partnership.

Is Damage Prevention Public Safety or Public Relations?

An interview with Josh Flud (formally with City of Lubbock), Deerwood Construction, General Manager

By Ketha Molina, Senior Damage Prevention Manager, Texas811

Ketha Molina: Josh, I understand that last year you attended a state conference on damage prevention where a pretty bold question was raised: *Is damage prevention a public safety matter or a public relations matter?* What was your initial response?

Josh Flud: Honestly, I didn't hesitate—I said, "Of course it's a public safety matter." Anyone who has experienced or responded to a damaged utility incident knows how dangerous it can be. While gas line strikes usually come to mind first, the risks go far beyond that.

Ketha: That's a good point. What are some of the less obvious line strikes that pose safety concerns?

Josh: Let's start with electric lines. Striking an electric line—especially when you're using a wet steel drill stem—can lead to severe injury or death. It's not just about the immediate danger to human life; you're also talking about damage to transformers, service interruptions, and significant costs to restore power. There's a cascading effect—businesses lose perishable goods, repair crews are deployed, and residents are left without power.

Ketha: And what about telecommunications? That's something many may overlook in terms of safety.

Josh: Absolutely. While most of us have cell phones, older adults still depend on landlines, and many critical systems—including 911—run through fiber. Damaging a fiber line can knock out emergency communications for hours or even days. Businesses rely on fiber for everything from credit card transactions to supply chain systems. When you damage those lines, it's not just an inconvenience, it's a serious disruption.

Ketha: Now let's talk about gas line strikes, which you mentioned earlier. What should people understand about the dangers there?

Josh: When a gas line is struck, the environment can become explosive—literally. New polyethylene lines are particularly prone to static charge. In confined situations, like with directional boring, gas can migrate through old clay wastewater pipes—pipes that were never designed to be airtight. That gas can travel right into buildings. That's why we remove manhole lids on both sides of a strike and actively monitor nearby structures. Gas can travel several blocks, and that puts entire neighborhoods at risk. The fear and financial impact on residents and business owners during evacuations is immeasurable.

Ketha: It sounds like the local fire and police departments are also heavily involved in gas line responses.

Josh: They are, and they should be. Any hazardous release calls for a coordinated emergency response. That includes fire, police, and utility crews. It's resource-intensive and expensive, diverting critical services from other emergencies.

Ketha: What about water and wastewater systems—how do they fit into this?

Scan here for the entire article

April Safe Digging Month in Texas: Keeping You Safe Through Awareness and Education

By Mindy Chiem, Senior Marketing Manager, Texas811
Jennifer Pratt, Program Manager, Texas811

In damage prevention, we understand exactly why we do what we do. We've seen the consequences—injuries, damage, and real loss—when someone breaks ground without checking what's below.

That's why **April**, National Safe Digging Month, matters so much here in Texas. It's our chance to shine a spotlight on one clear message: **Contact us before you dig.** From McAllen to Paris and Odessa to everywhere in between, we're out in communities—meeting people, shaking hands, and making safety personal.

This year, **Texas811 secured 24 proclamations** from cities across the state, and we were proud to receive a proclamation from the **Governor of Texas** as well. We've brought our message to

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all kinds of events—horse races, car shows, baseball games, and safety days. If Texans are gathering, we're showing up.

And this year, we've taken a more focused approach. We're putting our message directly in front of the folks who put their hands in the dirt first—**contractors and excavators**. Studies say it takes hearing a name seven times before it sticks. Well, we're making sure Texas811 gets seen and heard **more than that this April.**

We want to be everywhere a contractor or excavator turns—on the road, in the inbox, on the radio. We want to be top of mind when someone's working in the yard, opening a package, or reaching for their favorite hat.

Our goal? **When someone sees an excavator, we want Texas811 to come to mind, a household name across the state.**

As part of this goal, we partnered with the Damage Prevention Council of Texas to bring the safe digging message, best practices, hands-on demonstrations and industry networking to a town near you.

Excavation Safety Days: How the DPC of Texas and Texas811 Work Together Toward a Common Goal

EXCAVATION SAFETY DAY YOUR TOWN

April marks the official start of digging season, and we at the Damage Prevention Council of Texas take excavation safety seriously. In recognition of National Safe Digging Month, the DPC held three excavation safety days and conducted a geofencing campaign blitz in targeted areas of the state. At the DPC of Texas, we aim to provide a communication network and education program that fosters collaboration with facility owners, contractors, and other public entities to minimize the risk of damage, injury, or death.

These educational events allowed attendees to learn about best practices for safe excavation. Industry professionals delivered insightful presentations, while outdoor demonstrations showcased real-world techniques and equipment.

Scan here for the entire article

Enforcement in Texas: Who are the Regulatory Agencies

By Sandoval Garcia. Stakeholder Support Manager, Texas811

Unlike many other states, Texas has multiple agencies with the regulatory authority to issue and enforce laws and codes related to excavation and damage prevention. As you can imagine, this can create confusion for all parties involved. That's why I'd like to help clarify this multi-layered regulatory approach.

Chapter 251 – The Texas One Call Law
At the foundation is Texas state law, commonly referred to as Chapter 251. This law can be enforced by a county attorney, district attorney, or the One Call Board of Texas. While Chapter 251 provides definitions, penalties, and outlines the general duties and requirements for excavators and facility operators, it's also notably vague in certain areas. For example:

- It does not limit the scope of work
- It does not specify whether a locate request expires
- It only identifies three ticket types: Normal, Emergency, and Damage (Digup)

From the viewpoint of a casual excavator, this simplicity might seem like a benefit. However, the lack of detail can also lead to confusion and inconsistency, particularly for experienced stakeholders used to more specific regulations in other states.

The Role of the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) and the TAC
Texas has a long-standing relationship with the oil and gas industry. To help regulate this critical sector, the state granted oversight authority to the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC). In 1977, this led to the establishment of the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), specifically Title 16, Chapter 18.
This section of the TAC addresses excavation near underground pipelines and includes:

- More precise definitions
- Time limitations for the validity of a locate request
- Update intervals for ongoing excavation
- Detailed documentation and reporting requirements throughout the excavation lifecycle

It's critical to remember that these administrative rules are mandatory for both underground pipeline operators and anyone excavating near pipelines.

So, Which Set of Regulations Applies?

"Which set of regulations do I need to follow as an excavator?"

At Texas811, our focus is always on public safety and damage prevention. Because of this, we strongly encourage excavators and operators to comply with all applicable laws and regulations. We understand how hard our excavation community works every day, and we never want to see anyone injured or any infrastructure damaged.

As a member-driven organization, we're equally committed to supporting our facility operators by helping protect their assets and maintaining reliable service. At the end of the day, damage prevention is a shared responsibility—and the more informed we all are, the better we can protect people, property, and essential services.

Answering the Call: 24/7 Support Solutions for 811 Notification Center Shifts

By Scott Sasajima, Chief Operating Officer, Texas811

At Texas811, we believe that protecting critical infrastructure and keeping communities safe requires more than just answering the phone. It demands true operational partnership, a commitment to excellence, and a vision that stretches beyond state lines. Over the past 15 years, Texas811 has risen to meet the growing needs of 811 notification centers across the country, providing dedicated support for a wide range of service demands including bilingual customer support (Spanish and English), overflow call routing, web ticket processing, after-hours and holiday coverage, and emergency outbound communications.

Answering the Call for Real Support
As many already know, the excavation and damage prevention landscape is constantly evolving. Whether it is increasing complexity in compliance and response expectations or adjusting for growing demands for 24/7 or Spanish-speaking support, notification centers have much experience managing those dynamics. While rising ticket volumes are typical year-over-year, the ongoing wave of infrastructure projects presents challenges that extend beyond how notification centers traditionally adjust with supply and demand. Another challenge that notification centers can face is the cost of fully staffing during off-peak periods, which can divert capital that might otherwise support the most impactful damage prevention programs and resources. The question becomes: who can these states trust to help address these challenges?

Texas811 has proudly answered that call. We deliver tailored, economical solutions to meet every operational need, including daytime overflow management, full after-hours support, weekend and holiday coverage, web ticket processing, and bilingual Spanish-language services. More importantly, we enable notification centers to continue delivering exceptional service even when their own teams need to take time together to regroup for company trainings, holiday parties, or all-hands meetings.

A Legacy of National Support
Texas811's story of support stretches back decades. In addition to proudly serving our home state of Texas since our founding in 1984, we have long-standing partnerships across the country.

We have continuously supported all of South Dakota and West Virginia 811's notification center needs since 2010, becoming trusted operational extensions of their state programs. In 2011, following devastating tornado damage to Alabama's 811 center, Texas811 stepped in to provide critical backup services that helped maintain operations during their recovery period. We have also previously supported Minnesota (Gopher State One Call) and South Carolina 811. For almost a decade, Texas811 has continued to serve Mississippi 811 and New Mexico 811, and more recently expanded services to Oklahoma (OKIE811) and Georgia 811 in 2022, as well as Virginia 811 in 2024.

> Our ability to provide consistent, high-quality service at scale is no accident.

Specialized Services That Fill Critical Gaps
Beyond bilingual call-taking and web ticket support, Texas811 has expanded its specialized services designed to meet the evolving needs of today's One Call industry.

- **Emergency (Outbound) Voice Notifications:** Live agents deliver real-time emergency notifications to affected parties.
- **Risk-Based Intervention (Outbound) Voice Notifications:** Proactive, live agent outreach based on an analytics-driven risk scoring of excavation notices to prevent damage incidents (*requires operator membership*).
- **Full Holiday and Event Coverage:** Complete operational support (inbound, outbound, and web ticket processing) allowing centers to fully close during holidays, company-wide meetings, and team-building events.
- **Outage and Failover Events:** Immediate operational support for unforeseen events, including network outages, severe weather, or other operation-impacting circumstances that require a reroute of calls or web ticket processing.

These services ensure that when a notification center needs to scale back, pivot, or quickly adapt, Texas811 is ready to step in seamlessly and "answer the calls".

Scalability Backed by People and Technology
Our ability to provide consistent, high-quality service at scale is no accident. Texas811's Damage Prevention Center includes over 200 professionally trained Damage Prevention Agents, with over 36% being fluent in English and Spanish. Our agents and customers are supported by multiple Texas811 departments, including the Damage Prevention Supervisors, Quality Assurance, Coaching, Training, Workforce Management, Technology, Human Resources, and Leadership and Development.

Not only do we serve multiple states, but we also have a large dispersion of employees, particularly our agents, who

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from the desk of JERRY POAGE

Jerry Poage, Executive Director, West Virginia 811

I hope everyone in West Virginia has had a great start to their year. We have been very busy at West Virginia 811 promoting call before you dig, dig safely, and how to use the 811 process to improve the operators and excavators' experiences.

We believe in the necessity of partnership and when that fails, we work to educate stakeholders about West Virginia's enforcement program that begins with submitting suspected violations of the state's dig law. The invitations we've received from utility companies, state agencies, excavation companies and even schools are encouraging. We are grateful for the opportunity to educate any group across the state about the importance of safe digging which begins with calling 811 before you dig.

The festival season starts soon here in West Virginia, and we look forward to getting the word out at many of them. It is a great way to introduce West Virginia 811 to stakeholders, including homeowners, to help them understand the benefits of using 811 to reduce damages one project at a time.

As WV811 celebrates its 45th anniversary we want to strive to do better every year and aim for a damage free state. Check out the AVR page in this magazine to see how you can do your part to help. If anyone would like to set up classes for WV811 and Damage Prevention, please reach out to me at 540-819-2093 or you can email me at ***jerry@wv811.com***.

Reporting Complaints to the Damage Prevention Board

By now, many of you have heard that there is enforcement regarding West Virginia's dig law. For example, if someone is digging without a One Call ticket, that is a violation of current law and the violator can be held accountable for the violation. Some have asked the question, "How do I report someone who is violating our dig law?"

That's a fair question. In the Rules and Procedures adopted by the West Virginia Damage Prevention Board (WVDPB) Section 4-1-4 states that WV811 will provide a space on its website for individuals and facility owners to call and provide information regarding a violation. Additionally, Section 4-1-5 states that the board shall also receive complaints via US mail, telephone and email. An Alleged Violation Report (AVR) form was created for the web as stipulated in the Rules and Procedures to allow anyone to submit a complaint against a company/person who may in be violation of the state's dig law.

This form can be found on the Damage Prevention Board's website at *www.wvdpb.com.*

Some have asked, "When should I submit an AVR or when should I report someone who is violating the dig law?" To this question there is no right or wrong answer. From the earliest days of working to include enforcement (education and/or civil penalties) the idea of enforcement was promoted as a last resort. The hope was that stakeholders would continue to try to resolve issues in the field as they had done in the past and if resolution was not possible, enforcement was an additional step to be used to encourage behavioral change.

While you can submit a complaint by phone, mail or email, the advantage of submitting an AVR is it gives you a guide to provide information necessary to investigate the complaint. It also becomes available to the board or its representative as quickly as you hit the submit button.

The form requires you to enter your name and contact information including your email address and phone number. There could likely be questions regarding the complaint and without the proper contact information, it would be impossible to continue the investigation. Be sure to list your best contact information.

The Damage Prevention Board also wants to know whether a damage occurred as the result of the alleged violation. The required response is yes or no.

The most critical section of the AVR form is the information that identifies the location of the violation. Which includes "uploading photos and/or other documentary evidence." Uploading a PDF or photo is really quite simple. Just click on the "File Upload" button and select the document(s) or photo(s) from your computer or phone that you want to submit and upload.

Submitting AVRs without any supporting documentation and/or photos will likely end in no violation and a lot of frustration. The more documentation you provide to support your alleged violation, the better your position. Any photos submitted will be even more effective if they are date and time stamped and helps tell the story of the violation. You can upload photos, documents, sketches, police reports, etc... any documentation that you think will prove your case conclusively.

You will also need to enter the person or company and their contact information (if known) that committed the alleged violation. It is critical in the investigation process and in the penalty phase of the enforcement to know who the alleged violator is and some contact information for them.

There are five (5) types of alleged violations in the AVR under the heading of "Type of Alleged Violation." This is a required field.

Remember, a violation can occur without a damage and it is possible to have a damage where no violation has occurred. Here are five types of violations not associated with a damage.

- **Excavating without a One Call locate ticket**
- **Excavating early**
- **Failure to locate underground facility**
- **Did not locate facility in the required time**

Scan the QR code to file a complaint

For more information about the AVR or the enforcement process, you may contact the Board at *wvdamageprevention@gmail.com*, call 304-657-4839 or visit the website at *www.wvdpb.com* and click on the "rules & procedures" icon.

Always in the past, West Virginia stakeholders knew the benefit of working together. The hope was that stakeholders would continue to try to resolve issues in the field as they had done in the past and if resolution was not possible, enforcement was an additional step to be used to encourage behavioral change.

Another National Safe Digging Month has come and gone. I've got to say it is encouraging to see how many people recognize the importance of safe digging. What we hope we can do is take that same awareness into every month and continue to dig safely.

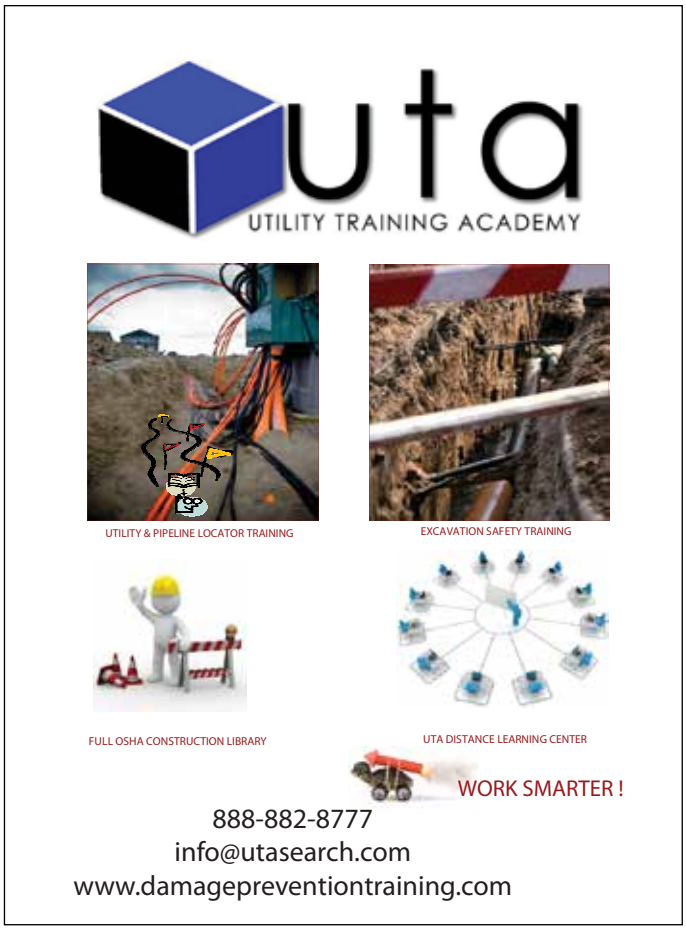
It will take us all to make that happen. From the utility owner to the excavator and everyone in between who cares about safe digging and preventing damages, thanks for your commitment to keeping West Virginia a safer place to live and work. The West Virginia Damage Prevention Board (WVDPB) has been out in full force organizing education classes, setting up at the Contractor Expo, and getting out face-to-face with those who are digging or plan to dig.

Alleged Violation Reports (AVR) are on the rise compared to last year which means the word is getting out and those that violate the 811 law are being held accountable. Accountability is not just civil penalties (fines) but many times is training.

The mission of the WVDPB is to educate all stakeholders on how to prevent damages before they happen, not react after a damage has taken place. We are striving every day to keep damages to the lowest possible level with zero being the ultimate goal.

If you or your company would like to have a free education class to learn more about WV811 or the Damage Prevention Board, or to see how you can be more involved with us, please reach out to me or Jerry Poage and we will be more than happy to come set up at your event or do an education class.

Brandon Hahn, WVDPB
304-657-4839
Jerry Poage, Executive Director, WV811
540-819-2093



Making Real Change

By Mike Sullivan, President, Utility Safety Partners

How many psychologists does it take to change a lightbulb?

Only one, but the lightbulb has to want to change.

I heard that riddle for the first-time decades ago when I worked for a department of the federal government. The organization was facing serious issues due to a management team that was disengaged with staff. Management claimed it "knew best" how to navigate toward the future despite not being part of the team working directly with stakeholders. I'm reminded of that when I gaze across the damage prevention landscape.

Everyone working in the damage prevention space wants to reduce, and if possible, eliminate damages to buried utilities. And to that end, every year, we see repeated and new slogans like "Mission Zero", "DigSafe", "Know What's Below" or more recently, "50 in 5". But will we reach "zero" by repeatedly doing the same thing – just louder and bigger? Not likely, no.

Throughout the decades of damage prevention, each method to confirm the location of buried energy and utility assets prior to digging helped reach new safety plateaus and reduce damages. Before coordinated Notification Centres, utility owners initiated and promoted their own program to alert the public to safely excavate near their buried assets. As time moved on, utility owners coordinated their respective damage prevention processes under a single locate request through One Call centres. Call Centres were busy! And in the 80s, the Fax machine arrived providing diggers with an option – a Brand New Way to be safe! Life was good but boy oh boy, talk about labour intensive for the One Call centre!

Over time, One Call centres improved the process with better mapping and technology but until the advent and proliferation of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, "the Call" and fax were the only way to initiate the damage prevention process. When One Call centres began offering the ability to submit locate requests online, it remained a labour-intensive effort within the Call Centre as Agents entered dig site information into locate request software. Slowly, locate request software improved through updates and releases of entirely new platforms. And when the smartphone took over, with iPhone in the lead, mobile applications allowed excavators to submit locate requests from anywhere – and in parallel, locate request software options also improved. The "Smart Ticket" went from the locate requester's fingertips to the utility owner bypassing One Call centre Agents altogether.

Suddenly, the options to submit locate requests were plentiful. The landline anchor had been lifted! The "Call Before You Dig" call-to-action began shifting to ClickBeforeYouDig – particularly in Canada. Canadian undergound infrastructure owners with transborder assets had long desired a common call-to-action that could be promoted across Canada and the United States. The failed bid to secure 3-digit / 811 dialing in Canada ended up being extremely fortuitous. Within a few months of promoting ClickBeforeYouDig, Notification Centres experienced a rapid and sustained shift to the online process. Software needed to shift, too, and it did. And soon, we learned that shifting the locate request process to the web was not only more efficient, but it was also reducing damages – and the reasons were so simple and straightforward.

1. More Accurate Information

- **Online forms guide the user** through all necessary questions—like the type of work, exact location, scope, and depth.
- Users can **attach maps or draw the dig area**, which gives utility locators a much **clearer picture** of where digging will happen.

Why this matters: Utility locators are less likely to **miss a spot or mark the wrong area,** reducing the chance of a strike.

2. No Miscommunication

- Phone requests rely on verbal communication, which can lead to:
  - Misheard addresses
  - Ambiguous descriptions ("near the tree in the backyard")
  - Accents, background noise, or unclear phrasing

Online requests eliminate that risk by using written, standardized information.

3. Better Mapping Tools

- Online systems often let users **pinpoint their dig site on a satellite map,** or even upload site plans.
- This level of detail just isn't possible over the phone.

Result: Fewer "guesswork" markings = fewer accidental hits on underground utilities.

4. Fewer Data Entry Errors

- Phone / Call Centres rely on an operator to **manually input** your information into the system.
- With online submissions, **you enter it directly,** meaning one less step where something could go wrong.

5. Complete & Validated Requests

- Online systems can require **mandatory fields** and provide prompts if something's missing or unclear.
- They can also **validate addresses** instantly against GIS databases.

Phone calls can't guarantee the same level of consistency or quality control.

The Result: Fewer Damages

The DIRT Report would be a great place to challenge the data Alberta is realizing and the way to do so is simple:

In Part E of the DIRT Field Form, after "Was the 811 / One Call Center notified of intent to excavate" (followed by a "Yes / No" box), add the following question:

If 'Yes', how was the locate request submitted: Web / Call

And then analyze the data. If web requests are shown to reduce damages, then ClickBeforeYouDig needs to be captured as a Best Practice and a campaign to promote it initiated.

Slogans help promote awareness, but making real change will only happen when we stop repeating the same things over and over again.

Elements of an Effective Watch and Protect Program

By Benjamin Lynch and **Michael Burroughs,** TRC Companies

In today's rapidly developing infrastructure environment, protecting buried utility lines—especially natural gas facilities—is essential to public safety and project success. Excavation-related damages can lead to catastrophic incidents, costly repairs, and extended project delays. The Watch and Protect Program was developed as a proactive approach to safeguarding underground utilities during excavation. The program fosters a culture of safety and accountability by emphasizing education and collaboration through streamlined communication. Here we will explore the essential elements that create an effective Watch and Protect Program that is beneficial to everyone affected by construction activities.

The Watch and Protect Program is designed to ensure the safety of buried facilities and those who work near them. Its core goals include:

- Safeguarding infrastructure during excavation
- Enhancing safety for workers and the public
- Minimizing the risk of utility conflict and project delays
- Promoting collaboration between contractors, locators, and facility owners
- Facilitating impactful, lasting education and active field support

The program's success lies in its ability to foster greater accountability, deliver timely education, and proactively address issues as they arise on-site.

A cornerstone of the program is the delivery of on-site educational sessions designed to reinforce safe digging practices and damage prevention protocols. These discussions include:

- Proper locate procedures and interpreting utility markings
- Importance of exposing marked facilities before digging
- Properly supporting and protecting exposed lines
- 811 best practices and excavator responsibilities

By engaging workers directly in the field, Watch and Protect representatives create working relationships that develop a deeper understanding of excavation safety. This hands-on approach increases situational awareness, improves job site processes, and reduces the likelihood of utility strikes. Most importantly, it promotes an understanding of the shared responsibility for damage prevention across all groups involved in construction activities.

One of the most important educational aspects of the program is reinforcing proper 811 procedures. This includes:

- Educating contractors on when and how to call 811
- Explaining the responsibilities of both excavators and facility owners
- Encouraging proper hand-digging protocols
- Discouraging complacency

Reinforcing the fundamentals of 811 and promoting consistent communication helps create a culture of safety. It also ensures that damage prevention remains a top priority, even under tight project timelines.

Excavation crews often encounter situations on-site that raise questions and concerns about facility markings, ownership, and locate response timeliness. The Watch and Protect Program ensures these concerns are addressed quickly and clearly. Representatives provide:

- Clarification on identifying and understanding markings
- Guidance on facility owner-specific processes and procedures
- Reinforcement of the importance of maintaining visible, accurate locates

Real-time field support empowers contractors to proceed confidently and safely. By resolving on-site issues, the program reduces confusion and helps maintain compliance with 811 regulations and facility owner requirements. In any complex excavation project, discrepancies in utility locates can occur. An effective Watch and Protect Program includes a rapid response mechanism to:

- Identify locate challenges early through visual inspections
- Ensure accuracy adjustments to markings are made promptly
- Facilitate coordination and understanding between contractors, locators, facility owners, and homeowners alike

These steps prevent project delays and eliminate downtime by ensuring locate issues are identified and swiftly resolved. This proactive approach minimizes excavation risk and keeps projects progressing safely and efficiently.

Major improvements to project outcomes have been seen with the utilization of pre-construction meetings. Pre-construction meetings are essential for larger or

high-risk projects to align all stakeholders. These meetings serve to:

- Coordinate contacts between contractors, locators, and facility owners
- Review project scopes and identify critical dig locations
- Clarify safety protocols and mitigation strategies
- Define timelines, procedures, and operational standards
- Address potential issues before excavation begins

Establishing expectations up front and promoting open communication builds a foundation for safer, more efficient work. These meetings also serve to build trust and cooperation among all parties involved.

While accurate locates are a key part of excavation safety, effective damage prevention goes beyond markings. The Watch and Protect Program encourages contractors:

- Confirm utility locations through potholing/daylighting and hand-digging
- Avoid mechanical excavation near marked lines
- Take accountability for safe excavation practices

Frequent and repeated interaction during excavation helps ensure that safe practices are being followed throughout the project lifecycle. By promoting accountability and maintaining engagement during active digging, the program provides the necessary safety pipeline that can significantly reduce the risk of damage and delay.

An Effective Watch and Protect Program can also enhance the impact of the cornerstone of any Damage Prevention Program-Community Outreach. Taking a proactive approach to informing the public helps build awareness and educates those outside of traditional construction trades who may still pose a risk to underground utilities.

Effective outreach efforts through the program include making regular visits to tool rental companies, landscape and garden centers, and home improvement stores. These locations often serve homeowners, landscapers, and small contractors who may rent equipment and begin digging projects without fully understanding the risks involved. By providing

educational materials, answering questions, and reinforcing the importance of 811 and proper locate request procedures, we can help spread the gospel of Safe Digging where it's often needed most.

Additionally, active involvement in local 811 Damage Prevention Councils keeps Watch and Protect Specialists up-to-date on issues being faced by individuals in the field. These meetings offer fantastic opportunities for education and clarification as well as a chance to continue to enhance collaboration between facility owners, contractors, and the public. Together, these community-facing efforts strengthen the program's effectiveness and extend safety awareness beyond the jobsite.

The benefits of a well-implemented Watch and Protect Program are clear and measurable:

- Enhanced Worker and Public Safety: Reducing the risk of accidents through proactive education and field monitoring
- Lowered Risk of Facility Damage: Preventing costly repairs and service interruptions by minimizing excavation-related strikes
- Improved Communication and Coordination: Facilitating seamless interaction among contractors, locators, and owners
- Increased Project Efficiency: Minimizing project delays through on-site support and timely problem resolution
- Greater Compliance with Safety Protocols: Promoting accountability to ensure adherence to state regulations, 811 processes, and facility owner standards

These outcomes make a Watch and Protect Program an invaluable asset to any utility damage prevention strategy. However, an effective Watch and Protect Program goes beyond safeguarding underground infrastructure—it develops a proactive culture of safety and accountability. By combining education, outreach, field support, pre-construction coordination and streamlined communication, the program enhances safety through every phase of an excavation project.

With the rising complexity of utility networks and the increasing demand for safe digging practices, adopting a Watch and Protect Program is not just beneficial—it's essential. Commitment to continuous improvement through enhanced damage prevention approaches has become an essential step in meeting the growing demands of all construction stakeholders.

Achieving the shared goal of protecting workers, the public, and critical infrastructure by understanding and implementing the Elements of an Effective Watch and Protect Program will strengthen the foundation of modern utility management and will help us to build a safer, more efficient future.

The Lines Below: Protecting Lives and Budgets Through Accurate Mapping

By Abraham Alpuerto, Geolantis.360 Technical Expert and Business Development Manager, PelicanCorp

Imagine attempting to perform surgery without any imaging tools. No X-rays. No MRI. No idea what's underneath. That's what excavation is like without accurate maps. It's not just inefficient. It's dangerous.

Underground infrastructure powers our lives. Beneath every road and sidewalk are gas lines, power cables, fiber optics, sewer lines and water pipes. When crews dig without knowing exactly where these systems are, accidents happen—and they can be catastrophic. Data from the Common Ground Alliance (CGA) 2019 DIRT Report shows utility strikes continue to cost the U.S. tens of billions annually in direct and indirect impacts.

When Mapping Fails

Poor mapping isn't just an inconvenience, it's a risk to lives, budgets, and infrastructure. Across the country, inaccurate or outdated utility maps have led to delays, lawsuits, injuries, and even deadly explosions.

The following incidents reveal what can happen when crews dig blind, relying on flawed records instead of precise, up-to-date data.

San Diego, CA: Inaccurate Maps, Delayed Project, Costly Payout

In 2024, Orion Construction of Vista sued the City of San Diego after a pipeline replacement project in Mission Beach ran 159 days over schedule. The issue? Inaccurate maps. Orion expected to encounter 160 underground utilities but ran into 324—double the amount.

The unmapped utilities caused major delays, forcing crews to abandon their planned sequence and slowing productivity to a crawl. A measured-mile analysis showed Orion could install 75 feet of pipe per day with known conflicts, but as little as 20 feet per day with unknown ones. The city ultimately agreed to a $1.26 million payout, drawing from its water and sewer funds. As reported by the San Diego Union-Tribune, the case highlights the hidden costs of poor utility records and the growing need for accurate digital mapping.

Parkville & Independence, Missouri: Multiple Gas Line Strikes During Fiber Installation

In August 2024, contractors installing Google Fiber in Missouri struck multiple gas lines across locations, including Parkville and Independence. Despite following 811 protocols, mis-marked gas lines, among other factors, led to dangerous outcomes—most notably, a home explosion in Independence. According to KCTV5 News, experts attributed these incidents to inaccurate utility markings, contractors digging too fast or ignoring marked lines, or a lack of familiarity with local infrastructure by out-of-state contractors. The events highlight how accurate digital maps play a critical role in keeping communities safe—even when 811 is called.

The Power of Digital Mapping

Traditional utility mapping methods, such as paper records or outdated databases, are prone to inaccuracies. Digital utility mapping leverages advanced technologies like Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to create precise, up-to-date maps of underground infrastructure. These digital maps are more accurate and easily accessible to field crews, engineers, and emergency responders.

Modern mapping systems go far beyond points and lines on a screen. They show:

- Where utilities are, with GPS-level accuracy
- What each line is made of and when

it was installed
- How deep assets are buried and where joints or valves are located
- Critical control points like shut-off valves and cross-connections

Detailed metadata supports smarter maintenance and better planning with fewer surprises. It also means faster decisions in a crisis. When a gas leak occurs or a pipe bursts, responders can quickly locate valves and isolate hazards. No guesswork. No waiting. Just safer outcomes.

Cost Savings That Add Up

Accurate utility mapping reduces waste, duplication, and errors across every stage of infrastructure projects—from planning and permitting, to construction, maintenance, and emergency response.

1. Fewer Utility Strikes
Digging confidently around known utilities reduces the likelihood of costly and dangerous strikes. CGA's DIRT Report noted over 189,000 reported damages in the U.S. in 2023 alone. Accurate mapping could help reduce these incidents significantly.

2. Reduced Truck Rolls
Crews don't have to revisit sites repeatedly to verify utility locates. This saves fuel, vehicle wear and tear, and labor hours. For large utilities, this can result in millions of dollars saved annually.

3. Streamlined Locating and Marking
Locators spend less time on each ticket when utility paths are clearly documented. This enables faster turnaround on 811 tickets and reduces overtime and backlogs.

4. Precise Design & Planning
Accurate digital mapping helps identify utility conflicts early, reduce relocations, and improve collaboration across agencies. In Texas, the Department of Transportation (TxDOT) reported over $23 million in cost avoidance by implementing digital utility coordination tools during the design phase of major construction projects. This success was achieved through the Strategic Highway Research Program 2 (SHRP2) utility conflict management (UCM) approach, as detailed in a report by the Federal Highway Administration.

5. Improved Construction Efficiency
Contractors avoid downtime caused by unmarked lines or unexpected discoveries, such as abandoned lines. Jobs finish faster, with fewer change orders or work stoppages.

6. Predictive Maintenance
Knowing wall thickness, pipe age, and past failure points lets utilities prioritize high-risk assets, replace aging infrastructure proactively, and avoid major system failures.

7. Better Capital Planning
Municipalities can align replacement schedules with upcoming projects (e.g., water main upgrades during a planned road repaving). This coordination leads to significant shared cost reductions and less public disruption.

The Human Cost: Lives, Not Just Dollars
Beyond the dollar savings lies a more profound value—lives saved and injuries

avoided. Striking a high-pressure gas line can lead to explosions that put workers and residents at risk. Severing a fiber cable during an emergency can disrupt communication for hospitals or emergency responders.

Accurate digital maps with rich metadata don't just improve performance—they protect people.

Why Every Stakeholder Should Care
Whether you're managing a utility network, locating buried lines, breaking ground on a job site, or shaping public infrastructure—accurate mapping matters to you.

- **Utilities** benefit from more reliable service, fewer emergency repairs, and reduced liability. With accurate, current maps of their underground infrastructure, they can respond to outages faster, maintain assets proactively, and plan upgrades more effectively.
- **Locating Companies** gain efficiency and confidence in the field. When maps are trustworthy, locators spend less time verifying utility positions and more time completing jobs. This means:
  - o Fewer callbacks
  - o Better documentation
  - o Improved accuracy in marking lines
- **Contractors** rely on accurate mapping to eliminate costly guesswork. Projects stay on schedule and within budget, thanks to fewer surprises underground. Accurate data makes communication with stakeholders smoother, reducing delays and disputes.
- **Communities** also reap the rewards. Fewer utility strikes mean safer neighborhoods, uninterrupted services, and smarter infrastructure investment. When cities can plan and coordinate repairs or upgrades using dependable subsurface data, they save money and reduce disruptions to residents.

What's Next?
Accurate mapping isn't a nice-to-have. It's a must. And the future is already here: AI-powered mapping, drone-based data collection, and augmented reality are transforming how we understand the underground.

Final Thoughts
You can't fix what you can't see. And you can't protect what you don't know is there. Investing in digital utility mapping isn't just about compliance or cost savings. It's about building safer, stronger communities, from the ground up.

It's time to bring clarity to what's underground. Because what we don't see matters.

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Source: *https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/utilities/pdf/hif20090.pdf*

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live and work across a wide geographic footprint. Within Texas, our team members are based everywhere from El Paso to the Rio Grande Valley, Houston to Dallas, and throughout the rest of the state. Beyond Texas, we also have team members who reside in Oklahoma, Louisiana, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota, ensuring full regional coverage and operational resilience.

Our technological capabilities have continued to grow with our size, enabling us to partner with and support notification centers operating on different platforms, officially making Texas811 a platform-agnostic service provider. What may have previously been considered a limitation has become our demonstrated strength, as we just celebrated one year of providing Spanish-speaking services for Virginia 811. Our services and systems are designed to minimize effort and reduce operational costs regardless of the platforms involved, allowing us to support a wide range of clients with flexibility and speed.

Human-Centered Innovation

Our mission has been and always will be damage prevention and public safety. Like many who live and breathe damage prevention, the core of our model is understanding that damage prevention is ultimately a human experience and a shared responsibility. Technology helps streamline workflows, but the ability to create safe outcomes originates from well-trained people who care about the quality and safety of each interaction.

We continuously invest in tools and teams that improve both customer interactions and the working experience for our agents. Our focus remains on providing the highest quality damage prevention experience, which applies to our customers, partners, and employees.

Built on Trust, Designed for the Long Haul

Texas811's growth has always been grounded in sustainability and intentionality. We have built long-lasting partnerships with state agencies, operators, and infrastructure partners by delivering exactly what we promise: responsiveness, reliability, and results.

We do not just fill gaps temporarily. We help 811 notification centers rethink and fulfill their operational and damage prevention strategies for the future.

Looking Ahead

The challenges facing the damage prevention industry are only growing. Fiber buildouts, broadband expansion, smart infrastructure investments, and increased excavation activity all demand stronger systems and stronger partnerships.

Texas811 is ready to meet these challenges by continuing to invest in people, platforms, and partnerships while staying focused on the mission that has guided us since the beginning.

Our Enduring Commitment

At Texas811, answering the call means more than delivering services. It means building partnerships rooted in trust, backed by operational excellence, and focused on protecting what matters most.

We have not simply expanded operations. We have thoughtfully organized and strengthened how expansion happens by ensuring that every new partnership, every additional service, and every evolving need is met with purpose, precision, and pride.

As the demands of damage prevention grow, so too will our commitment to being the partner this industry can always rely on.

acts

ACTS Company Members make the ACTS mission possible by supporting the continued growth of this incredible community, over 2,000 individual members and growing. Scan the QR code to view the benefits of becoming an individual and company ACTS member, supporting damage prevention and excavation safety year-round.

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Communication and Documentation- The Cornerstones of Safe Excavations

By Bob Nighswonger, President, Utility Training Academy

I've had the chance during my career to take part in thousands of damage claims. I've drilled thousands of damages to a root cause as a damage prevention quality analyst, and a huge percentage was the result of a failure in communication. A famous quote comes to mind by the late actor Strother Martin in a 1967 movie called Cool Hand Luke, "What we've got here, is a failure to communicate." In our industry, clear communications create a better understanding of the damage prevention process and can prevent an incident from occurring. Unfortunately, in the U.S., we are averaging about one damage every one to two minutes. I can say without a doubt that many stakeholders have learned and unfortunately will continue to learn the hard way - if a conversation between an excavator and a locator was not documented, you can't prove it ever happened. What can happen is memory loss and confusion about what was discussed. I've experienced this damage scenario as a young locator when locating a long highway widening project with daily conversations and a handshake agreement on a locating schedule.

Underground utility locating and underground excavation are high-stake activities that demand accountability while following a certain code of conduct.

At the heart of a successful locate and excavation project are two essential elements: communication and documentation.

These principles are fundamental, heavily supported by the Common Ground Alliance (CGA) best practices, Chapter 4 best practice 14 and 15, respectively. Whether it's in the form of verbal, written, digital, or nonverbal, communication builds shared understanding among all stakeholders, while documentation captures the work done and proves that it was done correctly. These best practices are not standalone ideas; they form the foundation of nearly every damage prevention activity on a job site. When communication breaks down or documentation is incomplete, even the best-trained construction crews and line locators increase the risk of utility strikes. But when applied together, these two practices create a framework of awareness, accountability, and transparency.

Forms of Communication

Communication on the job site is multifaceted. It includes spoken words and written instructions, but also field markings, emails, and digital records. Verbal and written communication covers pre-excavation meetings, direct phone calls between locators and excavators, and jobsite briefings. These conversations align expectations and clarify questions about scope, timing, and responsibilities, and should be clearly documented. This is often part of a pipeline right-of-way documentation requirements.

Electronic communication adds a structured layer of information sharing. Excavators typically initiate the process by contacting their state or regional One Call center to submit a locate request. This step alone is a critical form of communication—one that launches a chain of responsibilities and responses. Regional One Call centers serve as communication hubs, routing notifications to utility owners and their contracted locating firms. In response, facility owners or their locating contractors review the request and send positive responses back to the excavator. These updates may be issued via email, through ticket management platforms, or directly posted to regional 811 websites. Many state One Call systems allow excavators to view positive responses by entering their ticket number, offering real-time updates on who has marked their facilities, and what to expect on-site.

In the field, non-verbal communication occurs when site markings are placed. Excavators use white paint to outline their proposed dig site, a process known as white-lining, that is optional in many states. This key visual site marking tells the locators exactly where excavation is taking place and where markings are needed. When locators respond to mark the jobsite, they visually communicate with paint, flags, or stakes using the (APWA) Uniform Color Code which identifies the purpose or type of product traveling through a pipe or wire buried beneath the surface. Field markings often include size and material notations, such as "6" STL" to identify a 6-inch steel pipe. This clarity helps excavators distinguish marked, active utilities from

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the maze of unknown or abandoned infrastructure below ground. Another key point to communicate is the presence of abandoned facilities on the jobsite by placing an "A" inside of a circle using the appropriate color. The letter "A" is used to indicate the presence of an abandoned line and normally not its location. While not all abandoned facilities are locatable, marking or providing mapping details of their known location visually adds another layer of communication between the locator and excavator.

Techniques and Platforms for Documentation

If communication helps avoid utility strikes, documentation helps resolve them. Documentation is more than a checkbox—it's a detailed record of what was done, how it was done, and when. It serves both operational and legal purposes. In the event of an incident, documentation becomes the evidence used to determine who did what and whether all reasonable precautions were taken.

Every locate should result in a clear, time-stamped record. This includes:

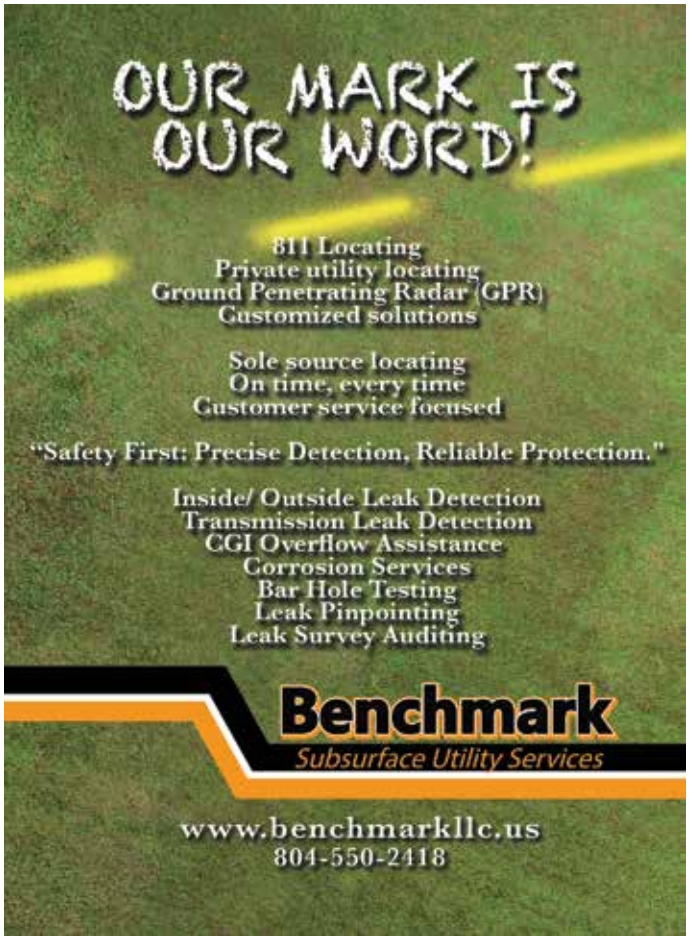
1. Name of the locator
2. Equipment used
3. Environmental conditions
4. Methods applied (e.g., direct connect, passive sweep)
5. Any observations made during the locate
6. Most importantly: what was communicated, when, and how

Digital photography is one of the most effective documentation tools available. A properly framed photo can capture markings, show surrounding landmarks, and preserve site conditions before excavation begins. When possible, locators should photograph white paint from the excavator along with their own color-coded markings to document the full communication cycle. These photos often include metadata such as GPS coordinates and timestamps, automatically linking them to a location and moment in time.

Beyond photos, written field notes remain vital. Every phone call attempt, voicemail, and site update should be logged with a date and time. If a voicemail box is full or a call goes unanswered, that information should still be noted. Many experienced locators keep daily work journals in chronological order, creating a consistent timeline of their activities.

Ticket management systems have transformed the way both communication and documentation are handled. Locators receive 811 notifications through these platforms and can respond by uploading photos, closing tickets electronically, and adding site notes. These entries are often pushed back to the excavator through email or accessible portals. Some systems even offer audit trails that show exactly when a ticket was created, accessed, or closed. These platforms are not only used by locators. Excavators can also maintain records of their own, from white-lining images to notes about which utilities have responded. In cases where projects stretch over days or weeks, these systems provide continuity and clarity, ensuring that new personnel can review previous activity and make informed decisions.

scan here for the entire article



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