



Tonry Topics

PREVENTING DAMAGE TO UNDERGROUND UTILITIES

Over the last several years, we have noticed an increase in the number of claims arising from damage to underground utilities, as well as an increase in the dollar value of the claims and a more aggressive response from the utility companies. We would like to take the opportunity to remind everyone of the rules and regulations of “excavation” and Dig Safe©. Dig Safe© is a not-for profit corporation, funded entirely by member utility companies, to promote public safety, protect vital utility services and safeguard against property and environmental damage serving MA, ME, NY, RI, and VT.



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Reasons to Call

- It is the law to call Dig Safe©
- You must call for a utility mark-out request at least 72 hours in advance in MA, ME, and NH, and at least 48 hours before in RI and VT, excluding weekends & holidays
- In Massachusetts you must call regardless of where the excavation is.
- You must call for any job that fits the definition of “Excavation”. In the State of Massachusetts, *“Excavation” means an operation for the purpose of movement or removal of earth, rock or the materials in the ground including, but not limited to, digging, blasting, auguring, backfilling, test boring, drilling, pile driving, grading, plowing in, hammering, pulling in, jacking in, trenching, tunneling and demolition of structures, excluding excavation by tools manipulated only by human power for gardening purposes and use of blasting for quarrying purposes.* Definitions vary by state.
- State Regulators will check for a valid Dig Safe permit when inspecting a site.

Premark Your Site Before You Call

“Premark” means to identify the general scope of excavation activities using white paint, stakes or

other suitable white markings, in a manner that will enable utility operators to know the boundaries of the proposed excavation activities.

Maintain Your Marks

- You are responsible for maintaining the marks placed by member utility companies at your site.
- Hold pre-construction meetings before you start the excavation; walk all employees through the site, note the location of all utility markings.
- Pay special attention to any changes in direction that the underground facilities take.
- If your excavation causes the removal or disturbance of the markings, establish offset marks in order to maintain a reference point for those underground facilities.
- Make sure that *everyone* involved is aware of any offsets that have been established, any marks that have been compromised, or any other information regarding facility locations.
- Keep markings visible at all times. Avoid driving machinery over stakes and flags. Paved areas should be swept periodically.
- If marks have faded or been compromised to the point where proper and safe excavation is no longer possible, contact Dig Safe to request a re-mark.
- If you refresh the markings at the site, make sure that you use the uniform color code and identification letters to avoid any confusion.

Unfortunately, even when you follow all the rules, occasionally damage can occur to underground utilities. Keeping strict records of the job site, documentation, and pictures of the site before and during the excavation process will help to defend your case against one of the utility giants. Documentation can also prevent any unnecessary upgrades to utilities (i.e.: cable vs. fiber optics) in the event a utility is damaged because it was improperly marked.

Dig Safe© has recently changed their corporate logo to include ‘811’, the federally-mandated “call before you dig” number that was created by the Common Ground Alliance, an organization dedicated to reducing damages to all underground facilities in North America. The Common Ground

Alliance has determined that an underground utility line is damaged during digging projects **every three minutes** nationwide. Dig Safe© recently helped to promote “811” day on August 11th to contractors, and even homeowners for weekend projects, to get underground utility lines marked for free. The existing phone number of 888-DIG-SAFE is still a working number, but going forward they are encouraging the use of 811 as the primary contact number.

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