

Underground Service Alert

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In a recent underground incident, a contractor digging on a site unearthed and cut a Bell fiber optic cable. The total cost of “downtime” for the users exceeded \$8 million. Can anyone afford such a cost?

When excavation on a construction site accidentally hits an underground utility line, there’s more than money at stake. Your own safety is in danger, too. A ruptured natural gas line can cause a fire or explosion. A severed electric line can kill you.

Underground utilities, electric, telephone, gas, water, and others may be almost anywhere under a construction site. They were usually put in at different times, and different companies own them. How do you find them before you dig? To prevent problems, there is a statewide telephone hotline that contractors can call. It’s called Underground Service Alert (USA). USA will contact the utilities, which will come to the site and mark the location of all underground lines.

OSHA requires that

- In any public location, the contractor must call USA before digging.
- On private property, the property owner is responsible for finding and marking the location of existing lines and for noting easements.
- When digging is to begin, the contractor must notify the companies owning all underground lines.

You or a crewmember may want to add a personal story about underground utilities.

Next, discuss with the crew where there may be underground utility hazards at this particular job site:

Ask the Crew these Questions

After each question, give the crew time to suggest possible answers. Use the information following each question to add points that no one mentions.

1. How accurate are the markings that USA makes on the ground?

- USA marks are accurate within two feet either side of the line.
- Use caution when you work closer than five feet to underground lines that USA has marked.

2. USA uses a color code for the markings it makes. What do the different colors mean?

- Blue --Water
- Green -- Sewer
- Purple -- Reclaimed Water (optional)
- White -- Excavation Border
- Red -- Electric
- Yellow -- Natural Gas/Liquid Petroleum Products
- Orange -- Communication (telephone, etc.)

3. How far outside the white borderlines can we dig?

- Zero. If anyone has to dig outside the originally marked excavation borders (white lines), management must call USA back and have the area remarked for all lines.

4. At what depths are different utilities found?

- There's no general rule. Utilities are not usually placed at specific depths. You may find that a particular utility line is six feet deep at one location on a site, but only one foot deep just 100 yards away.

On this site, we have found that the various utility lines are at these depths...

Give types of utility lines and their depths:

5. At what point do we stop mechanical excavation and begin to excavate by hand?

- Stop mechanical excavation when you get too close to a known underground line.

On this site, we stop mechanical excavation...

Explain the site rules

OSHA Regulations

Explain: OSHA requires most of the safety measures we've talked about. We have to take these precautions -- it's the law. I have a Checklist of the OSHA regulations on underground utilities. If you'd like to know more, see me after the meeting.

Company Rules

(Only if applicable.) Besides the OSHA regulations, we have some additional company rules about underground utilities. Discuss company rules:

Comments from the Crew

Ask the following: Do you have any other concerns about underground utilities? Do you see any problems on our job? (Let the steward answer first, if there is one.)

What about other jobs you've worked on? Have you had any experience with underground utilities that might help us work safer on this job?

GENERAL SAFETY REVIEW

This is a time to review all safety concerns, not just today's topic. Keep your notes on this page before, during and after the safety meeting.

Are you aware of any safety hazards from any other crews? Point out any hazards other crews are creating that this crew should know about. Tell the crew what you intend to do about those hazards.

Do we have any other safety business? Discuss any past issues or problems. Report any progress of investigations and action taken.

Have there been any accidents, near misses or complaints? Discuss any accidents, near misses, and complaints that have happened since the last safety meeting. Also recognize the safety contributions made by members of the crew.

Please remember, we want to hear from you about any health and safety issues that come up. If we don't know about problems, we can't take action to fix them.

ENDING THE MEETING

Circulate Sign-Off Form.

Assign one or more crew member(s) to help with next safety meeting.

Refer action items for follow-up.

Do you have any Safety Recommendations?

Do you have any Job Specific Topics you would like us to discuss?

Have you reviewed the M.S.D.S Sheet for this safety topic?

Yes____ No____ N/A____

Comments

SAFETY TALKS REVIEW

Notification and Marking:

- The telephone number for USA is properly filed or displayed in the job office.
- All supervisors understand the USA process and how to request USA.
- All areas on the job site where digging can or will take place have been identified.
- USA has been notified of all these areas, and areas are properly marked.

Worker Training:

- All employees who operate digging equipment are familiar with the various USA paint colors and the utilities they represent.
- Operators are aware that utility lines may be found at any depth.
- Workers are instructed on how close to an underground line mechanical excavation should stop and hand excavation begin.

Work Practices:

- While an excavation is open, underground utility installations are protected, supported, or removed as necessary.
- Workers know what to do if utilities are damaged while working in USA marked areas.

List site rules: test your memory...

- Workers know what to do if utilities are damaged while working in USA marked areas.