



## BEST PRACTICES For Unintentional Encounters with Buried Facilities

If contact with a buried facility occurs, during excavation, contractors must ensure that their employees are prepared and know what steps to take to protect themselves, the general public, the environment, equipment, and other utilities.



To ensure safety and avoid damaging underground utilities, anyone planning to dig or excavate is required by law to contact their state One-Call (811) center 48 to 72 hours before digging (depending on local law). You will be notified when you call as to when all marking of lines is to be complete. Depending on site location and size, the excavation site should be either marked with white or coordinated with local and state one call representatives. One-call tickets must be on site before excavation activities begin and remain available while actively excavating.

OSHA has rules on locating underground utilities during excavations see 29 CFR 1926.651(b). For more information on locating underground utilities, refer to “Best Practices for Locating Underground Utilities”. By using proper locating techniques and excavation procedures, you can avoid contacting underground utilities. However, if underground utilities are disturbed or damaged while digging, the best practice document reviews basic steps to follow and provides more detail on how to assess the situation at the site. Employers should also comply with OSHA’s emergency action plan standard (29 CFR 1926.35) if an emergency action plan is required by a particular OSHA standard.

## **Basic Steps to Follow if an Underground Utility is Disturbed or Damaged**

1. Shut down all equipment and eliminate ignition sources
2. Evacuate the area—including employees, subcontractors and general public. Essential personnel will assess the situation from a safe distance as described below.
  - Employees should gather at the muster point and then account for all personnel
  - For gas and oil pipelines, move up wind and away.
  - For electric utilities be aware of the equipment or structures that may be energized and avoid contact.
3. Maintain a safe distance and assess the situation
  - Secure the area. Keep out unnecessary personnel. Allow only trained repair and emergency personnel onto the site.
  - Do not assume the damaged utility or its attachments have been de-energized. Stay away from the area until utility service providers can confirm system is de-energized.
4. Notify appropriate emergency agencies
5. Notify utility owner promptly. If damage results in the release of hazardous gases or liquids, both utility owner/operator and appropriate emergency response officials should be notified immediately
6. Notify company/client management for proper reporting protocol
7. Notify 811 within the time frame mandated by the individual state requirements

## **Assessing the situation**

1. Identify the type of damaged utility from a safe distance.
  - Without compromising safety, attempt to note the type, approximate size, diameter, material, color or other descriptors that may assist in the identification of the ownership of a damaged utility in multiple underground utility areas(s).
2. Contact appropriate utility company.
  - The type of utility damage and which utility is affected dictates who is notified. Most utilities have signage that gives the proper phone number to contacting in case of an emergency. NOTE: 811 may assist you in the identification of the ownership of a damaged utility.
3. Be aware of type of release(s).
  - If applicable, safely attempt to identify what is being released from the damaged utility. Knowledge of the substance being released may assist in the identification of the ownership of the damaged utility and also what level of additional protection may need to be applied to properly protect employees and the general public.
  - Pay extra attention to the release site. Keep in mind those utilities that can have the biggest impact, such as gas and electric utilities.

- If safe to do so, take necessary measures to protect the environment and neighboring areas from the release.
4. Do not try to fix or repair damage.
    - Do not attempt to alleviate or fix the problem unless the proper authorization(s) are provided and necessary training is in place. Maintain a safe distance from the area until the utility company can respond to the damaged utility and address any issues with the damages.
  5. Follow the direction of you company/client management.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, [employers are responsible](#) for providing a safe and healthy workplace and [workers have rights](#). OSHA can help answer questions or concerns from employers and workers. OSHA's [On-site Consultation Program](#) offers free and confidential advice to small and medium-sized businesses, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. For more information, contact your [regional or area OSHA office](#), call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), or visit [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov) .

*Through the OSHA and American Pipeline Contractors Association (APCA) Alliance, APCA developed this best practices document for informational purposes only. It does not necessarily reflect the official views of OSHA or the U.S. Department of Labor.*