



While sawing a trench for a fiber optic line, utility workers sliced through an unmarked steel service. The workers abandoned their equipment and called 9-1-1 as natural gas spewed into the atmosphere. The noise and odor alerted neighboring businesses that something was wrong.

Anatomy of a Digging Accident Response

A first-ever photo log of damage prevention gone wrong but disaster prevention done right.



In response to the 9-1-1 call, fire trucks arrive from the north...



...and the south.



Immediately aware that they were responding to a cut natural gas line, first responders prepare to establish a safe zone.

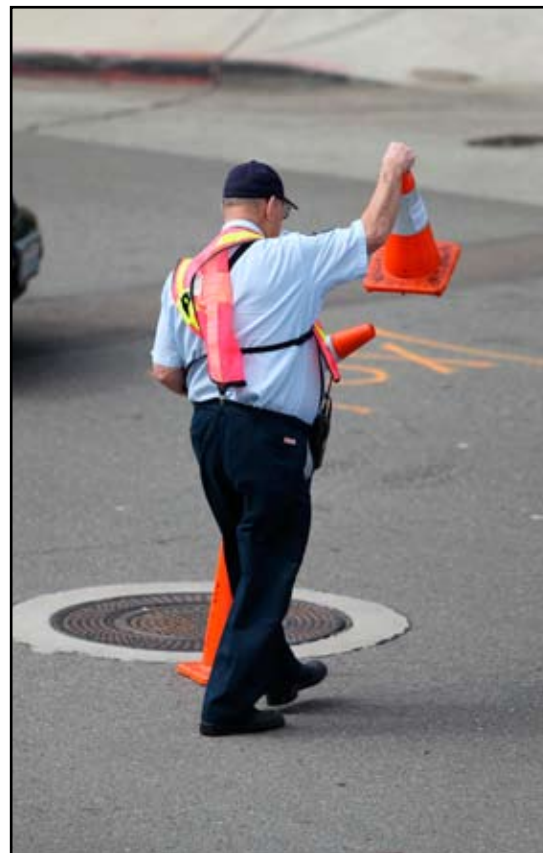


Pavement cracks are visible at this marked gas and electric joint trench located just outside the safe zone. The utility workers were trenching in this direction when they struck the unmarked gas service.

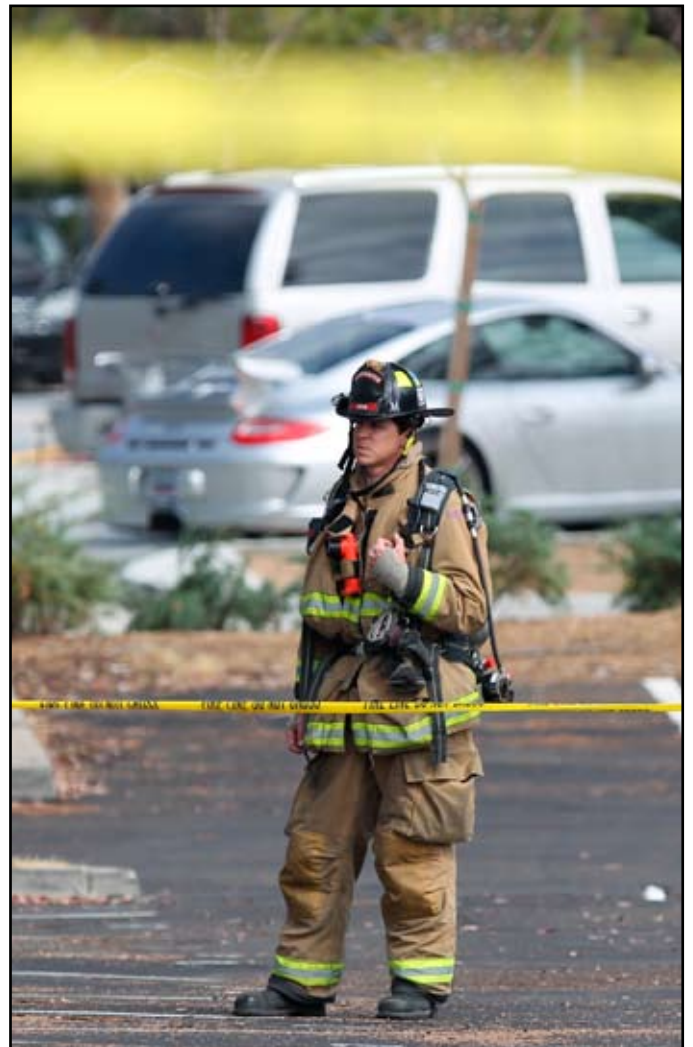




As work continues on the safe zone, the fire captain assesses the situation with the gas company foremen and one of his men.



Firemen ready a hose in case it's needed while a policeman works to help block all four lanes of traffic.



Once established, the safe zone is patrolled in order to keep curious onlookers a safe distance from the accident.





At the top of the photo, the gas company crew assembles on top of the unmarked service. Notice the crack in the pavement near their feet.



First things first: the gas company locates the unmarked service in advance of the squeeze-off of the steel line. This squeeze-off, or crimping, will be done on the opposite side of the road from where the trencher struck the line.

No line repair can be made until the gas flow is stopped and the trencher removed.



The battalion chief stops by to oversee the response. He questions his people: Has the wind direction been determined? Is the perimeter protected? Do you have a control zone set-up in case more gas company vehicles need entrance into the safe zone? Have ignition sources been eliminated? Breathing equipment on?

His people are ready in case something goes wrong.





Gas company workers break pavement on the opposite side of the street from the leaking gas. Here, the gas service will be crimped in order to stop the flow of gas.



A news camera records footage for the evening news.



The finishing touches are applied to the crimping of the gas service. With the flow of gas stopped and the situation under control, some gas company personnel can move on to their next assignment. The workers that remain will fix the cut line and then restore the gas flow.





The situation made safe, the fireman can relax. The gas company still needs a closed road for a bit but paperwork can begin.

