

Hits Along the Boulevard

As presented in last issue's *Deeds*, a mile-long road widening and sewer project began along the boulevard in early 2010. The project took one full construction season to complete. There were numerous utility damages. We're going to look at the damages and fill out the Underground Focus three-question damage report for each one.

- 1) Could the line have been located accurately from the surface?
- 2) If yes, why was the line damaged?
- 3) If no, what can be done to keep this line from being hit again?

You should note that ground penetrating radar (GPR) is potentially helpful for finding underground utilities no matter the circumstance. Since so little GPR is used to respond to one-call tickets, GPR will not be a factor in answering question #1.

March 4: Gas main damage



- 1) Could the line have been located accurately from the surface?

No. The bimetal, non-insulated tracing wire installed with the mains and services in 1972 has turned to hundreds, maybe thousands of discontinuous segments of wire. If you think you're locating the tracer wire you're likely locating something else that is a better conductor, such as the retired, direct-buried, copper phone feeder line.

- 3) If no, what can be done to keep this line from being hit again?

Whenever the gas system is exposed, place passive radio frequency markers in the hole to enable this location to be pinpointed in the future from the surface. Must have locating device to find markers and must plot location of markers on gas maps.

March 22: Electric secondary damage



- 1) Could the line have been located accurately from the surface?

Yes.

- 2) If yes, why was the line damaged?

There were no red marks over the damaged secondary line. The locator responding to the one-call ticket assumed the secondary cable to be in the same trench as the primary cable. The original primary cable was replaced in 2001. The live primary cable runs parallel and is 8 feet away from the abandoned primary (in whose trench the live secondary cable is situated). The electric company maps identify the presence of both the live primary and the abandoned primary, although there were no measurements to indicate the distance the two were separated.

April 1: Cable TV feeder line damage



- 1) Could the line have been located accurately from the surface?

Yes, it was.

- 2) If yes, why was the line damaged?

The excavator hand dug on the orange mark near the edge of the road and exposed a coaxial cable 2 feet deep. The problem was that this exposed cable was an abandoned feeder line. The live feeder line was 5 feet deep. The excavator tunneled underneath the exposed feeder and struck the deeper line. The abandoned feeder had been bored into twice during the installation of the phone company's new fiber system in 2008. The cable company performed a pedestal-to-pedestal replacement of that feeder after it was damaged for the second time in 2008. The boulevard crossing for the new cable was bored 3 feet underneath the path of the old feeder. **UF**

This column is the second in a series. In the next issue, we will cover more damages occurring along the Boulevard.

From Our Readers

Dear Publisher,

Your recent editorial "On the Mark", about contract locators and easement painters is unfortunately a reality. We had a project this summer in a multi-dwelling unit (MDU) complex where the locator marked a primary electric, a phone cable and another primary all next to each other. He used 3-foot wide corridor marks for each line, so it ended up being a 9-foot wide, red and orange corridor. Somewhere in the middle of his over-marked area was the private water that we were hired to mark. Not only did this type of marking cause a problem for the excavator (because they were hand digging), but this caused us to be unsure of the location of the water line in question due to their wide, overkill marks. We had another job a month ago (again in an MDU), where the one-call locator marked primary electric in three different cuts crossing the road. Again, the private water that we were asked to mark was in one of those cuts, but now we had doubts because the area was congested, making it tough to separate signals. After calling the one-call locator back to the site to look at the electric records, it was determined that the electric crossed the road approximately 100 feet south of the first road cut and that there was no electric in any of the three cuts. We were told that the cuts were marked as a precaution by the locator because he was not sure what was there. As it turns out, water was in the cut that we marked and there was no signal, no utility in the other two cuts. We see this kind of thing on a regular basis. We had a line marked in orange the other day with a question mark symbol in the middle of it. It was eventually determined to be an abandoned gas line.

I was at a Common Ground Alliance meeting in eastern Pennsylvania a few months ago. A few days after the meeting, the guy leading the group sent out an e-mail asking for topics of discussion. I responded with the idea of discussing the issues surrounding contract locating, the low bid process and how it leads to poor locates. I knew it would be unpopular, but I approved him sending the idea out to all the local members, which included a few guys from a local telecommunications company. Needless to say, they were very upset and the idea was dead. Nobody wants to step up and admit that the system is getting worse. The utility owners all say they are about damage

prevention, but it all comes down to dollars. It makes it very tough for the private locating companies to maintain a quality staff. We were recently asked by a telecommunications utility to submit on a one-call contract. They said they wanted some new blood and that the selection would not be based solely on price. Even though we typically stay away from one-call contracts, we decided to submit. In the end, the same old companies (the ones they said they were unhappy with) got all the work. No explanation needed.

I experienced another recent incident regarding problems with one-call locators. We called in a ticket for a new sewer project, we were being asked to dig test holes on all lines that crossed the proposed. Initially, the guy with a communications utility said he marked the area. The area was not marked. We later found out he marked a different site because he used a different mapping system from the one-call center. The second time we called in the ticket, they responded that the area was clear, which we knew it was not. This is why we called him back again to mark the line, which he did, but not in the area of the proposed (the area was staked). I called their 800 number to report the problem and get someone out there ASAP. I was connected to their help desk in India. The guy I spoke with had no clue about the line, only that it was not in conflict. I told him we were going to cut his line and he finally agreed to send his locator back. We were told that this was a high security line and that only his locator would pick up the fiber. We ended up sweeping for the line, getting a signal on it and had it exposed by the time the guy showed up. We exposed it at just over 3 feet deep. The locator told us it was between seven and 11 feet deep.

In my opinion, the system isn't working in the Maryland, Virginia and Washington D.C. area. I would be surprised if it was much different elsewhere. I could go on and on with stories. I do not know how it will ever change when the utility companies are in denial and the one-call contractors are forced to field low quality personnel.

Glenn Fox
Regional Director
PULS Inc.

Dear Publisher,

The words "bailout", "bankruptcy" and "recession" have become household terms in this time of economic uncertainty. Hopefully the following news will serve to ease some of the budgetary woes your organization might be experiencing. The Gopher State One Call (GSOC) board of directors has recently reaffirmed its three-year commitment to hold the per-ticket rate constant.

GSOC recognizes that many government agencies and larger facility operators require an indication of what will happen to ticket prices beyond just the next twelve months. We hope this three-year commitment will assist everyone with their planning and budgeting.

In 2008, GSOC ticket volume declined more than 10%. We anticipate that 2009 ticket volume may decline more than 20%. But through cost management and innovative business practices, GSOC will be able to sustain the \$1.45 ticket rate through 2011.

The core of our overall cost management plan revolves around increasing access to our services, not decreasing it. We are changing the way we do business with callers and facility operators and giving them greater control and flexibility over how they interact with GSOC. By allowing expanded Internet access to GSOC's core services, we have given both excavators and utility operators the opportunity to use our core services at their convenience and on their schedule.

Internet ticketing, or ITIC, was made available to professional excavators at GSOC in 2006. This was followed up with on-line access for homeowners and other casual excavators, called ITIC Lite, in 2007. In order to help contain our costs as much as possible, we need to increase the number of tickets we receive from Internet users. Here's how you can help: if your company contracts its excavation work, make sure all its subcontractors use ITIC when contacting GSOC prior to digging. If your company does its own excavating with inside staff, make sure they are using ITIC to submit their locates. For more information on ITIC, please contact the GSOC Help Desk at 800.245.5852 (Greater Minnesota) or 651.681.7326 (Metro) or via email at helpdesk@gopherstateonecall.org. With

continued on page 19