



A View From the Underspace

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The Doctor Will See You Now

This is the ninth edition of *View from the Underspace*. Previously, I've focused primarily on locating competency—the interface between the locator and the electro-magnetic locating instrument. Without directly saying it, I've encouraged my readers to consider that effective locating is a lot less about technology and a lot more about habits—habits such as:

1. Determine if sufficient transmitter current exists on target line;
2. Vertically investigate the shape of the field;
3. Laterally investigate the shape of the field;
4. Follow every trace to a validation point;
5. Understand how you can change the path of least resistance;
6. Practice induction and learn its characteristics
7. Remember, you'll never change a single result with the receiver

I'd like to think of these as the "Seven Habits of Highly Successful Locators." I'd like to thank Bob Ebberson of Schonstedt Instruments for gently persuading me to create these seven habits. (See related article by Angus Stocking). I've always maintained that the difference between a good locator and an average locator is that the good locator knows the difference between good information and bad and doesn't mark on

bad information. With this list of habits, we can now verbalize how the good locator goes about the business of successful locating.

I understand that it's hard to imagine that good locating can be shrunk down to seven short lines of text. But locating becomes quite simple when you understand that there are only about four things that can affect your results and about four things you can do to change your results. The seven habits ensure recognition of all potential outcomes while guaranteeing the instrument is used to its maximum capabilities.

How much bad locating is out there? Well, I just met representatives from three different small locating firms and each firm's largest account was a utility contractor that hired them to confirm one-call markings. I also just met a utility contractor that employs his own locating personnel to perform the exact same task—confirm one-call markings. In response to my last column, I received this from Don Plosser of Pipehorn, "Thanks for highlighting the great forgotten Reason 2 for locating. Locating Reason 1 is about 'Finding' and Reason 2 is about 'Avoiding.' Our common goal is damage prevention, and avoiding utilities is just as important as finding them. As one major utility contractor told me, searching a site for unmarked lines and verifying existing marks is cheap insurance and good business."

It's been quite a while since our natural gas distribution companies have begun complying with the Operator Qualification Rule. I wonder if this has actually brought down the number of damages to natural gas

lines. Any news about a statistical reduction of damages usually centers on the benefits of enforcement. Yet, I never hear that excavators using locators may be responsible for a reduction in overall damages.

Botched locating is near and dear to us at *Underground Focus*—literally. Take a walk with me around the block where my office sits and I can show you visual evidence of three mis-marked utility lines. I can also describe to you what happens inside your office when one phase of a three-phase underground electric cable is damaged by excavation—it happened twice this year.

Not that bad locating and contract locating have anything to do with one another, but wouldn't it be a refreshing change of pace for this column to take an introspective look at the contract locating industry? I'm quite confident that we can begin to accurately assess damage prevention's health by taking the temperature of contract locating. Is the patient sick? Tune in. **UF**

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