



ONE MORE SCOOP

One More Scoop is a new column that will look at issues involved in the prevention of damage to underground facilities. Each month, three industry leaders will give their views on a specific topic. This month, our panel includes **Ron Rosencrans**, founder of *Underground Focus*; **Walt Kelly**, a consultant in underground facility damage prevention; and **Don Heyer**, operations / PR manager for USA North.

This month, our panel of industry leaders discusses issues they see as vital for Common Ground Alliance to tackle as part of promoting effective damage prevention practices now that they have implemented 811.

Walt's View:

Let's look to the past for guidance. In 1994, there was a big conference sponsored by the National Transportation Safety Board and the U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Pipeline Safety. That group of about 400 participants agreed that damage prevention depended on the implementation of four factors: 1) All excavators must call before they dig; 2) All operators of underground facilities must be members of the "one"-call system; 3) There must be a swift, simple administrative enforcement system; and 4) There must be a large public education campaign.

Today, all states require an excavator to give notice to operators prior to excavation, though a fair number of states do not require that notice to be given through the notification center. The majority of states require virtually all owner/operators of underground facilities to mark their lines in response to notices of excavation. Public education campaigns have been vigorous, especially the 811 campaign. More states have an active enforcement program.

Which states have reduced damages? Statistics show that states with enforcement have reduced damages significantly. At the 2007 Damage Prevention Conference, the keynote speaker, Jim Kane, president of Southwest Gas (SWG), pointed out that SWG has operations in three states with similar laws, but one state has one-fourth the damage rate of the other two. Why? He says it is because Arizona has enforcement.

Based on studies of damage rates, Congress promoted enforcement of damage prevention laws in the 2006 PIPES Act. In states without effective enforcement, the Feds can do some enforcement when jurisdictional pipelines are damaged.

Back in 1997, I called in my first "one"-call ticket, I noticed that the municipality was not on the ticket. It had been "mandatory" for them to be a member for two years. I called them directly to get them to mark, which they did. I mentioned that they were supposed to join the "one"-call. They said they didn't want to. Eleven years later they are still not on the list of members. Neither are several other towns we went through. The state law puts the liability for all damages on parties who are required to join, but don't. But, with no enforcement, they ignore the law.

Back in 1986, Massachusetts started enforcing its Call Before You Dig (CBYD) law and immediately saw a reduction in damage rates. In the next few years, Virginia, New Jersey, Arizona and Minnesota followed suit. Damage rates fell.

In my opinion, promotion of simple, effective, administrative enforcement would be a great next-step for the CGA to really reduce damage rates.

Ron's View:

It seems that the introduction of 811 has been highly successful. At least that's my impression, although I haven't seen any data on numbers of calls to 811.

Now, we need to keep promoting the number to make more excavators aware of it and encourage those already aware of it to keep using it. And, we can't underestimate the challenge.

A possible obstacle as I see it is the proliferation of—11 numbers that people are being asked to remember. I saw a new one the other day—211. It's a United Way services number. You call it if you need help from the United Way. Then there's 611, for telephone company repair service and 411 for directory assistance. If you are traveling and need weather or road condition information, you call 511. In some places, 311 is the number to call when you want local government services. If you need emergency service in a hurry though, you call 911.

We've now added 811 to this group. It's sort of

like being introduced to a group of strangers. How many names can you remember without further memory reinforcement? In my case, anyway, not many.

As we continue impressing 811 on the memories of excavators, there is one large segment of this group that has historically been extremely difficult to reach—the homeowner. It's going to be almost impossible to get someone to remember 811 when they may go years between digging projects. You could say the same thing about experiencing 911 emergencies, except that you frequently see someone calling 911 on TV shows and in movies. Newspaper articles reporting on crimes often mention someone calling 911. We'll never get that kind of coverage with 811. Even news accounts of the worst subsurface infrastructure damages seldom mention whether or not the excavator called before digging.

So, my suggestion for the CGA's next big push would be to find some way to effectively cover the homeowner on the need to call. I've seen a lot of CBYD billboards and other advertising aimed at homeowners. The problem with this is the message is usually not on hand when the homeowner picks up a shovel or rents a backhoe.

There is a very do-able and practical solution—permanently marks residential service lines. The capability has been around for a long time. There are permanent markers that can be mounted on curbs. I've used flush markers consisting of disks with the CBYD message that lay flat on the ground and are held in place by stakes. You see them every time you mow over them. There are even "pop up" markers consisting of flags that are hidden under a flush mounted disk, but can be stood up when you want to see the exact position of a line. There are probably other, unobtrusive, but visible ways to permanently mark underground line locations.

This hasn't been done to any great extent, because no one is pushing it. The CGA should become the pusher. A first step—and a big one—would be to pressure cities to incorporate marking requirements into building codes. When you think about it, it seems strange that such a requirement doesn't already exist. Maybe some cities and towns have done it, but I haven't heard of any.

There have been many horrendous

accidents involving damages to gas service lines. Homes have been destroyed and people killed. Hits on power and phone cables, and sewer lines, have also been quite unpleasant. Maybe the CGA could take data on all these accidents to the U.S. Congress and get a national law passed. There's nothing wrong with thinking big.

The problem with building codes is they would not cover stuff that's already built. New lines would be marked as they are installed, but there would still need to be some way to get existing lines marked. That would probably be an even bigger challenge.

A big promotional push, complete with free markers, might be an obvious step. The timing would be the start of the gardening season. Plant those markers while you plant your flowers. "Planting instructions" would include how to determine the locations of your service lines.

Of course, it might not always be possible to determine line locations from valve boxes, meters and other above-ground indicators. But, there are undoubtedly ways to incorporate permanent marking into the current line locating processes. I would think that a bunch of sharp people on a CGA committee could think of a lot of possibilities and ways to implement them.

Success of such a project doesn't have to be absolute. If it doesn't get every foot of service line marked, it would still get people thinking about the existence of their service lines. In turn, that would get people to call 811 before digging around their homes.

Don's View:

Now that 811 is implemented, the CGA should not accept second best. I believe we should be proactive and request the FCC to use the same technologically as is used for 911. Currently if a person uses a cell phone and the cell site is in another state that call is directed to One-Call Center where the cell site resides and not where the excavation is going to occur. The 811 system should be able to identify which area the caller is calling from and direct them to the appropriate One-Call Center. In addition, there should some easy way for the caller to convey that they will not be excavating in the state from which they are calling. The 811 system could allow the caller to press the two digits of the state where they will be digging in and the 811 system should direct them to that One-Call Center in that State. The addition of 811 was a great idea, but with these suggestions it could be better. **UF**

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| April 14–18 | August 25–29 |
| April 28–May 2 | September 8–12 |
| May 5–9 | September 22–26 |
| May 19–23 | October 6–10 |
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| June 23–27 | November 3–7 |
| July 7–11 | November 17–21 |
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