

A Column Dedicated to Tracking Business Ethics in Damage Prevention

What are the odds of a utility or municipality locating something they do not own for an excavator? I am not talking about doing it on every one-call ticket. I mean the odds of a line being located when its location is specifically requested by an excavator. Do you think the odds are a 100-1? Are they 1,000-1? Are the odds 50-50?

Let me ask odds on something else. Suppose I know the location of my sewer lateral—where it crosses the public right-of-way. What are the odds the municipality will take that information and place it in their records if I bring it to them? Are the odds 50-50? Are they 1,000-1? If the municipality did accept my location information, what would be the odds that it would be accessible to excavators?

How about we shift our focus away from municipalities? Let's take a glance at a few photos and I'll ask you some questions about them. First off, let's say this is my yard in Austin, Texas. I want to plant a few trees. Will the electric company locate from the meter to my house when I phone in a one-call ticket?



Next up: The gas company calls in a one-call ticket for the renewal of this service line. Will the electric company in suburban Chicago locate from the transformer to the electric meter?



Lastly, a plumber needs to repair a frozen underground residential water line in Riverton, Wyoming. He calls in an emergency one-call ticket. Will the gas company locate from the meter to the house? What if this gas meter was located in State College, Pennsylvania?

In all three of these cases, the utility receiving the one-call ticket understands what type of work is being done and by whom. It's on the ticket. Suppose for a second that none of these "private" lines were marked by the utility. Would it be reasonable for the field locator to assume that the unmarked underground line represented a likely safety hazard for the excavator? I think so. So here's my question: What happens next?

Let me ask you another question. Assume that a municipality that operates a sanitary sewer system receives all of the one-call tickets for their city. Do you think the "work being done" field on the one-call tickets are scanned so that work such as "install gas main" and "install gas service" are flagged? If this happens, is it reasonable to assume that the municipality will do everything in

its power to assist the excavator with finding the location of sewer laterals?

What is the right thing to do? Utilities and municipalities need to set-up programs that assist their customers in finding solutions to find locations of buried, privately-owned utility lines. The key word, friends, is **assist**. If you are asked to help locate lines you do not own, have a plan that assists your customer. If it is apparent that an excavator is doing work around a private line that represents potential danger to the excavator or the general public, have a plan to assist that excavator even without a direct request for help.

Unfortunately, until there is a "Good Samaritan" law for damage prevention, I doubt we can count on all municipalities and utilities to have an ethical approach to the private line issue. Are there any municipalities and utilities that have assistance programs in place? You bet. They just don't make a big deal of it. I wish they would. The damage prevention industry sorely needs examples of leadership. **UF**

