

## Checks and Balances

**W**ould you describe current damage prevention methodology as a system full of checks and balances? There're plenty of things that would suggest that it is. The requirement for hand digging to expose the exact location of underground pipes and cables is one such check and balance. Locators mark the approximate location (check) and excavators find the exact location (balance). Positive response is another; the one-call center receives a dig notice and contacts all of the affected utilities (check) followed by each utility notifying the excavator that they have either marked or cleared the area (balance).

Designating utilities involves checks and balances: does what one paints and flags on the ground match up with what topside structures one sees? Do the ground markings align with information contained on the utility map? If the answer to both questions is "yes," then this part of damage prevention works extremely well.

Excavating companies employ a series of checks and balances at every job site prior to excavation. Crews are supplied with copies of the one-call ticket in order to verify that the dig area called in on the ticket is indeed the dig area marked. Companies that delineate their dig area with white paint, stakes or flags increase the odds of having exactly what they need marked when they arrive at the work site. If there are no marks adjacent to visible utility structures in or near the dig area, crews request re-marks from the one-call center. Plus, buildings and homes along the job site are inspected for signs of unmarked service entrances.

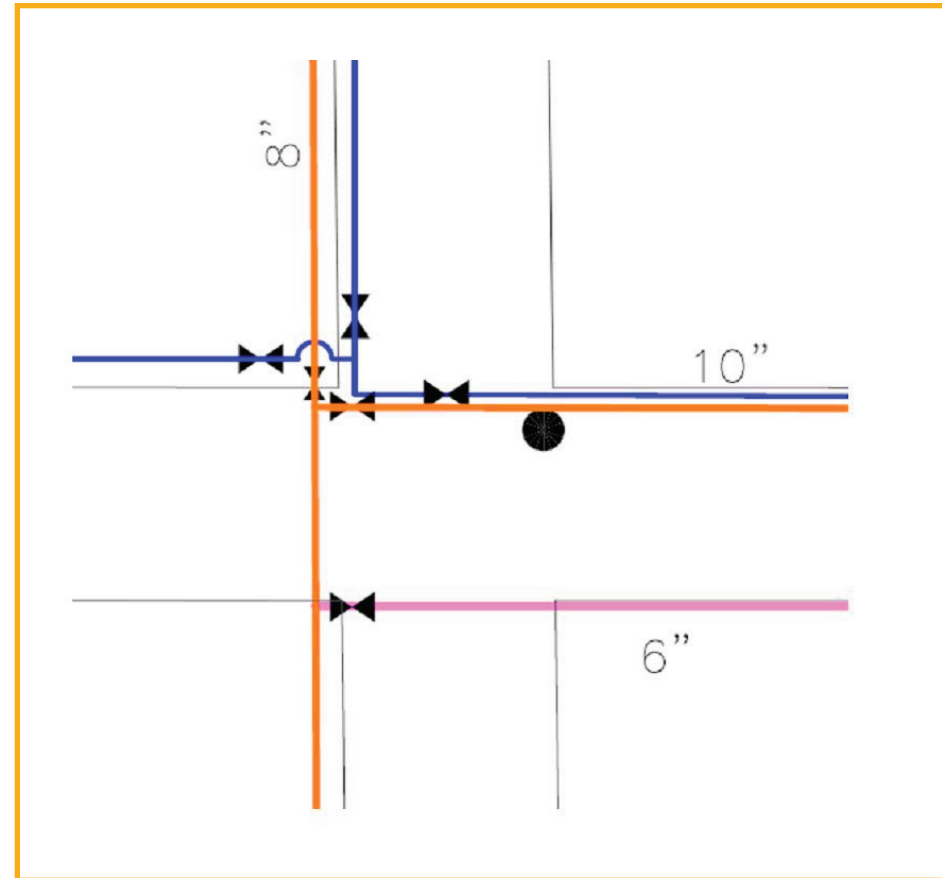
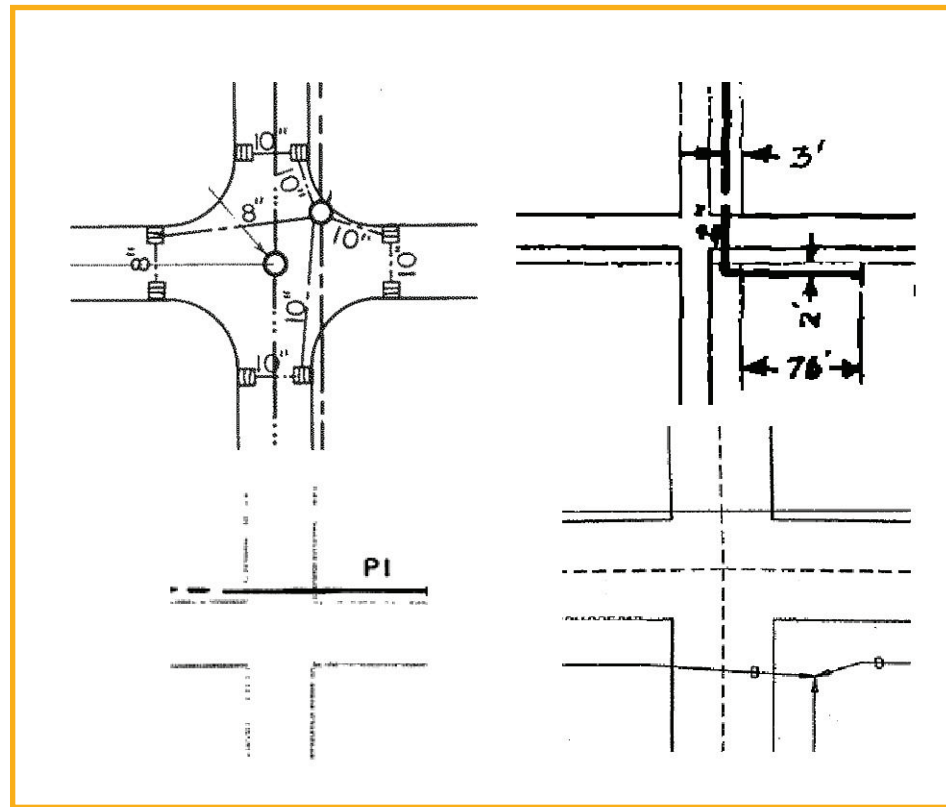
What happens when all of the utilities have responded to the one-call request and the

dig area appears to be marked adequately? Short of excavator error, there are essentially three conditions that can produce a live line strike: a mismarked line, a line not marked at all or the presence of multiple lines marked as a single line. There is a check and balance for only one of these conditions: a mismarked line error is corrected when the exact location is determined by hand-exposing the line. How do we provide balance for situations when lines are not marked or when multiple lines are marked as single line? Excavators must have access to utility maps. It's the right thing to do.

Elsewhere in this issue, *Deeds* features a look at a fictional construction site. The

line strikes that occur on this project are a result of the two conditions listed above for which there is a check, but no balance. Now, let's look at a scenario where there exists a balance for those conditions. An excavator outfitting an intersection with guard rails calls in a dig ticket requesting that the entire intersection be marked. Not only does the one-call center notify the utilities of the dig request, the center sends the excavator maps of all of the utilities within the dig area. Nothing about the damage prevention system has changed except the excavator has more information to take to the job site beyond a copy of the one-call ticket.

Shown below are the individual utility



maps an excavator receives following his notice to the one-call center. Clockwise from the upper left-hand corner are, 1) the storm and sanitary sewer map, 2) the gas map, 3) the telephone map and 4) the electric map. Shown above is the water map for the intersection.

This is, of course, a real intersection and the maps are the real utility maps. What is fictional is the one-call request. Standing at this intersection, there is visual evidence of the existence of every utility except for electric. There are no utility poles for blocks in any direction, and you must walk a ways away from the intersection to get a glimpse of a transformer.

Once the crew arrives at the intersection to perform its work, the workers walk the job site to look for something that may be amiss. Armed with a copy of the ticket and copies of the utility maps for the intersection, they observe that the electric line is not marked. A remark request is filed with the one-call center and an hour later the electric line is marked. The system

of checks and balances works. But what would have happened if the excavator did not have copies of the utility maps?

As we discussed in this column in our January/February issue, utilities are resistant to sharing their mapping information with excavators due to security and competition concerns. But can utility location information distributed in small parcels for the safety of excavators really put the utility at risk? If so, we'll never have a complete system of checks and balances in damage prevention. **UF**

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everyone's help, we can continue to keep our costs as low as possible.

Despite current economic conditions, GSOC will continue to pursue technological innovations that result in real savings. GSOC and One Call Concepts (OCC) have recently signed a long-term contract that contains numerous improvements that will increase efficiencies and produce savings over the coming years. Over the last seven months, we have added a new Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system that allows users to be transferred to an automated system for read back of ticket number and districts. Customer services representatives, who previously handled this task, are free instead to begin serving the next caller. We've also added some innovations to ITIC, such as Map tools, which make ITIC more user friendly and adds features that users find in other commercial mapping applications. We are currently adding "Map URL" to tickets, allowing utilities receiving their tickets electronically to view the excavation polygon and their facilities polygon and see exactly how they intersect.

It's not just the technology. GSOC has long been recognized as a national leader because of its public education programs. We will continue to meet this obligation. During its November meeting, the GSOC Board of Directors approved an increased public relations budget that will allow us to continue to conduct its public outreach effort. Many facility operators have become more reliant on GSOC's education and training effort since they find themselves cutting back or eliminating their own damage prevention budgets.

In summary, it is the goal of the GSOC Board of Directors to continue providing the same high level of service to the excavation and utility industry, and conducting public outreach programs while keeping our promise of leaving the ticket rate at \$1.45 through 2011. We hope this commitment from GSOC will in some measure help those relying on us as they address internal budgeting and planning concerns.

Sincerely,  
GSOC Board of Directors