

MAKING ONE-CALL WORK FOR YOU

USE THESE
HANDY TIPS FOR QUICKER,
BETTER SERVICE

When they work, one-

call systems are great, and when they don't, they're a real pain. The good news is that there are a few things that you, the contractor, can do to make the system work better for you.

MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR THE LOCATOR WITH WHITE PAINT

Locators really appreciate contractors who mark the area to be dug with white paint. It saves them a tremendous amount of time and frustration. And when a contractor saves them time, they are usually happy to help when the contractor needs something done on short notice.

Marking a street, for instance, could easily take a locator two hours if the ticket says "Mark 3rd street between Main and Center." If the project consists of putting in three trees and those three sites are marked with white circles, however, the locator might well be done in 20 minutes.

Do that a few times and you will have made a friend who will be happy to help you in the future when your customer



City of Winona, Minn., utility locator Roger Sandsness gives a "thumbs up" to the use of white paint by a local contractor to mark a dig site. This is especially helpful, says Sandsness, when the dig site lies above a busy intersection.

nails you with a change order to be done "right now!"

HOW TO SCHEDULE A "MEET" TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE SHOWS UP

White paint can also save you time when you have to schedule a "meet." You know the drill: The excavation area is hard to describe, so you call for a meeting with all the locators to discuss it. Problem is, you'd like to start work as soon as the parties arrive, since the meet time (in most states) is the same as the legal start time for the excavation.

Once again, white paint can help. That gives the various locators a heads-up about the site; oftentimes some will show up early and do some pre-marking. Even if they don't, they can hit the ground running when they do arrive if you've marked your dig.

HOW YOU LIST YOUR DIG SITE AND MEET SITE ARE CRITICAL

Another thing to remember about meets: Put the location of the *dig site* on the ticket but also put an easy-to-find *meet site* in the "remarks" section.

The reason is that most one-call centers carve up their service area into small squares (quarter-mile, half-mile, etc.), and keep track of which operators are in each square. When you call in a dig for one or more of those squares, they know which operators to notify.

If you put the location of the meet site on the ticket, while your dig site is in another square, operators in the dig area—especially corridor operators such as long distance telephone line and pipeline installers—may not be notified.

This can also happen if their facility is close to the edge of a square. The arguments after the hit usually include: "You should have notified us!" and "I called the one-call center!" and "We weren't notified!"

As notification centers adopt newer mapping systems, their descriptions of dig sites will change a bit. Watch for their training bulletins to ensure that you give them the all the data they need.

"GIVE ME SOME MORE TIME!"

Another way to befriend your locators is to give them more than the minimum two or three days the laws require. Most states allow you to notify the center up to 10 days before excavation begins. This is also true if you are among the fortunate folks whose notification center allows excavators to "fax-a-locate." At last count, about 72 of the 90 answering points in the United States accepted faxes.

Since many notification centers do not take routine tickets after normal working hours, and since some centers may be closed for a holiday when you're not, faxing in locate requests can extend your working day and cut hold time. High volume excavators (75-plus tickets per month) should check into the possibility of submitting requests by "remote-batch ticket entry" to the notification center. For this system to work you must be accurate in your ticket entry, but there is no hold time.

NEW TECHNOLOGY: GPS

You can also save a lot of time if both you and your locator use Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers. These high-tech gadgets use satellites to determine position within a few hundred feet anywhere on earth. (See related article on page 22.) Some state DOTs, utilities, and a few notification centers are already using this amazing technology, and you can expect many more to hop on



When scheduling a "meet," be sure to list the dig site on the ticket and the meet site in the "remarks" section.

the bandwagon. A basic receiver costs about \$300.

You can eliminate a lot of locator time wasted in trying to find your dig site in out-of-the-way locations if you submit the GPS coordinates of your jobsite. GPS is not accurate enough to actually locate the underground facility, but it will get the locator within sight of your white marks or white flag with no problem at all.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HIT AN UNDERGROUND FACILITY

U Protect life and property—in that order. If leaking gas or high voltage is involved, call 911. Gas explosions often result from breaks in the gas line near a building, filling the basement with gas. The break is often not at the place where the line was hit. Evacuation of the building and the surrounding area is critical.

U Document the details of the hit, including your one-call ticket number, where the marks are, where you hit the line, the safeguards you took, and any other evidence you'll need to support your claim that you did all that was required of you as the contractor.

U Call your insurance adjuster immediately. Your insurance premiums pay for defense against claims and your provider will be anxious to build a case in your favor. But if you wait to notify your insurance company, the evidence that could limit your liability may well be gone.

-By Walt Kelly, an underground facility damage prevention consultant based in Winona, Minn.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Author Walt Kelly is a former director of Pipeline Safety in Minnesota, where he had responsibility for enforcement of one-call laws.

As a consultant he helped establish the U.S. Department of Transportation's national campaign to promote safe excavation in 1994 and 1995, and has worked with states to upgrade their legislation. Kelly chairs the One-Call Systems International Center Certification Committee, writes for a number of publications, and is a principal in the Center for Subsurface Strategic Action.

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ARE EXCAVATING CONTRACTORS REPRESENTED ON YOUR ONE-CALL BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

If excavating contractors are not represented on your local one-call board, they should be. Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Oregon all have statutory language requiring excavator participation on the board; many one-call systems, however, are nonprofit corporations not subject to state oversight.

The most effective way to lobby for contractor participation is to work through your association. Were your AGC chapter to formally request a meeting with the local one-call board in concert with other excavator associations, such as landscapers and plumbers, the board would be hard pressed to reject you out-of-hand.

At the meeting, make the point that having excavators represented on the board would be a "win-win" situation: Input from users could only make the one-call system more effective and efficient. Let them know that excavator members could play a valuable role in user education and help out in many other ways.

If your local board is closed to the notion of extending membership to at least one contractor, the next best thing to do is request nonvoting membership. Under this arrangement, the contractor representative would attend board meetings and provide input where appropriate, but leave the room if requested by the board for discussion of sensitive topics.