

Louisiana



2023 Issue 2



Locating



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from the desk of

Brent Saltzman



Spring is in the air and one cannot help but get excited about longer, sunny days ahead. Everywhere you go, folks are actively involved in digging activities whether it be homeowners or professional excavators. That is exactly why we recognize and celebrate nationally - April-Safe Digging Month.

To kick things off, Governor John Bel Edwards signed a Safe Digging Month proclamation for the month of April. Having recognition of this is huge for our organization and our members and shows tremendous support from our governmental officials.

Ramping up our advertising campaign efforts was next. We initiated a statewide billboard and radio campaign spreading our safe digging message to thousands of Louisianians. Additionally, we sponsored baseball and softball games at Louisiana Tech, Tulane, ULL and ULM and had the opportunity to throw out the first pitch and distribute rally towels in team colors. We also teamed up with some of our industry partners such as Atmos and CenterPoint at various functions educating the public on why it is so important to contact

811. Several of these initiatives and more can be found in this issue, so I encourage you to see what we have done with our Advertising and Public Outreach dollars.

We have also been busy with legislation. The Dig Law Advisory Committee has been active as usual in helping strengthen our Dig Law. We currently have HB 292 that, as of this writing, has been passed by the House Commerce Committee. This piece of legislation specifically touches on the need to pothole to determine the actual location of certain types of underground utilities or facilities if an excavation or demolition could result in damage. It also clarifies that excavation or demolition activities shall commence not more than 120 hours (5 days) past the mark-by time.

If you would like to know more about our outreach efforts or legislation, please contact us and we would be happy to discuss further. As always, we are open to hearing your feedback as well.

Until next time, please continue to dig safely because someone is depending on you!

God bless,

Brent Saltzman
Executive Director
Louisiana 811

Louisiana 811



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Roger Cox, Publisher

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Contact Louisiana 811 for specifics in their dig law.

Letters, comments, and articles are encouraged and can be submitted to:

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Louisiana 811

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2023 Louisiana Convention Schedule

Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors of LA (PHCCLA) Annual Convention

July 13-15
West Monroe, LA
www.laphcc.org/page/Convention2023

Louisiana Rural Water Association (LRWA) Annual Convention & Trade Show

July 17-21
Lake Charles, LA
lrwa.org/annual-conference

Louisiana Gas Association (LGA) Pipeline Safety Conference

August 14-17
New Orleans, LA
www.louisianagasassociation.org/psc

Operations Report

Incoming Locate Requests:

Calendar Year 2022 – 214,943
Calendar Year 2023 – 205,014

Outgoing Notifications:

Calendar Year 2022 – 1,039,934
Calendar Year 2023 – 992,522

Call Ratio (Incoming notifications to Outgoing Members)

Calendar Year 2022 – 1: 4.84
Calendar Year 2023 – 1: 4.84

On-Line Ticket Entry

2022 YTD thru Mar – 81.89%
2023 YTD thru Mar – 89.95%



Traveling with Louisiana 811



John Neilson, DeSoto Waterworks District #1, LA811 Board of Directors, throws a strike for the first pitch at LA Tech baseball game.

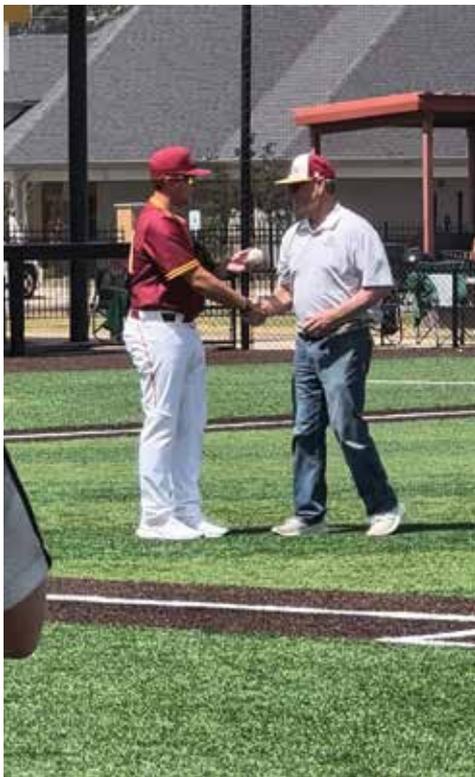


Governor Edwards signs proclamation for National Safe Digging Month

L to R: Taylor Creech (CLECO, LA811 Board Vice Chair), Brent Saltzman (LA811 Executive Director), Governor John Bel Edwards, Brad Deshotel (AT&T, LA811 Board Chair)



First pitch at UL-Lafayette: Molly Smith (Kinder Morgan, LA811 Board)



UL-Monroe baseball and softball sponsorship



Louisiana 811 LA Tech baseball and softball sponsorship



CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

The way I See it

By Cole Vanderlick
Manager - Damage Prevention
Louisiana 811



I recently attended the Common Ground Alliance (CGA) Conference, and am excited to share my biggest takeaway. CGA is a national 811 leader for all stakeholder groups. CGA obtains damage data from their members, called DIRT (Damage Information Reporting Tool). Not all states have mandatory damage reporting, but some states do. Many stakeholders submit damage data to CGA, so DIRT is a helpful resource that shows nationwide trends.

According to data from DIRT, three areas contribute to more than 76% of all damages.

- 25.7% = Failure to notify 811
- 28.3% = Failure to pothole, maintain clearance, etc.
- 22.3% = Failure by locator to mark accurately or on-time

CGA initiated a “50 in 5” challenge aimed to address damages to our Nation’s critical assets head-on by bringing damage prevention advocates together around a targeted set of strategic, data-driven priorities. “50 in 5” is a goal to reduce damages by 50% within 5 years.

When we see “failure to notify 811”, the first thing that comes to a lot of our minds is that they must not have known about 811. What is very interesting is that one of the 811 centers in the United States conducted a survey that was sent to people that they had damage data due to “failure to notify 811”. Would you believe that the survey had 0 responses for “I had no knowledge of 811”? This must mean that they know about 811. Instead, most responses included “Was told by someone that they did not need to notify 811”, “Did not think we were digging deep enough”, “Needed to get the job done”, “I had called previously”. CGA created a new 811 tagline to try to address these issues. “Safety is in your hands. Every dig. Every time.”, emphasizing the importance of doing the right thing with every project.

Regarding “Failure to pothole, maintain

clearance, etc.”, Louisiana Dig Law states, “§1749.16 (4) If an excavation or demolition operation could result in damage to underground utilities or facilities handling electricity, gas, natural gas, oil, petroleum products, or other flammable, toxic, or corrosive fluids or gases, pothole to determine the actual location of such facilities or utilities.” While excavating near markings, we must take extra precautions to avoid damage. The above statement is law for the safety of all. Louisiana law also includes an 18” tolerance zone, stating “§1749.14 D. For the purpose of this Section, the specific location of the underground facilities is defined as an area not wider than the width of the underground facility or utility as marked plus eighteen inches on either side.” Being careful and doing our due diligence can really help resolve this damage issue.

It takes everyone doing their part to help prevent damages. If we each try our best and communicate through our projects, we can come together to be successful. Lastly with “Failure by locator to mark accurately or on-time”, let’s discuss how we can help be part of the solution. Locators are extremely busy and short-handed, trying their best to manage the large dig ticket volume that they receive daily. Excavators can immensely help the 811 system run more efficiently by managing their tickets properly and not taking advantage of the system. Planning and doing their due diligence, submitting tickets when the law requires and managing ticket quantity, providing accurate location and contact information can go a long way in working with the industry to improve the entire process and prevent damages.

We can achieve our goals and prevent damages by working together and communicating. If we all do our part to the best of our ability, we can achieve the “50 in 5” goal and make our industry safer. Please reach out to us at 811 when we can be a resource to help you work safely. We are here to be your valued teammate! 

Utility Coordinating Council (UCC) Meetings

Interested in attending a Utility Coordinating Council (UCC) meeting? Check out the Events Calendar on the Louisiana 811 website or reference the schedule below.

CENLA First Tuesday of each month, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.
City of Alexandria Utilities

Lake Charles First Wednesday of each month,
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Golden Corral on W Prien Lake Rd

Ouachita First Wednesday each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Catfish Charlie's on Louisville Ave in Monroe

Lafayette Second Tuesday of each month, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.
Buffet City on Curran Ln

Livingston Second Wednesday each month, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.
Livingston Parish Health Unit

East Baton Rouge Wednesday following the second Tuesday of each month, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Sigma Consulting Group on Tuesday of each month Airline Hwy in Baton Rouge

Ascension Second Thursday of each month, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Ascension Parish Govt Complex on Worthey St in Gonzales

Natchitoches Third Tuesday each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Martin Luther King Center on MLK Drive

SELA Last Thursday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Entergy in New Orleans

Northlake/Northshore Last Thursday of each month, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Locations vary – see events calendar

Tri-Parish Meets monthly, dates vary – see events calendar, 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Terrebonne Parish Library in Houma

Bossier/ Caddo Meets quarterly, dates vary – Times vary - see events calendar, CenterPoint Energy in Shreveport 

Start the New Year with CenterPoint Energy

CenterPoint Energy training is focused on making sure your leadership and field personnel understand the 811 state laws, safe digging best practices, and other tips to help your projects be completed damage free without the delays and expenses of cutting a natural gas line. Most importantly, it is critical we cover how to stay safe in the event of a cut natural gas line.

Our training also covers the steps to prevent natural gas ignition, explosion, and inherent risks should blowing gas from a damaged pipeline occur in your community.



To schedule your training session, email PublicAwareness@CenterPointEnergy.com





National Safe Digging Month activities



Call 811 before you dig



Your safety is our number one priority.

From installing a new pool to simply planting a tree, digging without knowing what's beneath the surface can be extremely dangerous. You could also disrupt utility services to your neighborhood, leading to expensive repairs and fines.

When you call 811, all utilities, including Entergy, will respond within two business days to locate and mark the underground utility lines. (The two business days start the morning after you call).

And if you suspect a gas leak, leave the area immediately and call **1-800-ENERGY** (368-3749) or **911**. Indications of a gas leak include the distinctive smell of natural gas, a whistling or hissing sound near a gas appliance, or dead vegetation and bubbles near a gas line.

We power life.™

A message from Entergy New Orleans, LLC and Entergy Louisiana, LLC
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L to R: Jeff Morrison, LA811 Damage Prevention Coordinator, Bobby Morgan, CenterPoint Energy at Bass Pro Shop for Safe Digging Month

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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On-Time Locates Without Civil Penalties?

*By Roger Cox
President
ACTS Now, Inc.*

This article is not saying that locators and/or locating companies do everything right. But I am saying they don't do everything wrong. As the Executive Secretary for the Mississippi Underground Facilities Damage Prevention Board, I routinely receive complaints from the excavating community that a locate request is late or that it wasn't located at all, consequently, the locating company is reported as being in violation of current state law.

I routinely hear stakeholders state that the solution to late locates is a simple one. "Just hire more people," they say. Recently, an excavator remarked to me, "All I know is that it is not my problem. I'm tired of waiting and mark or no mark, I'm going to dig."

I realize that is an option but often it doesn't end well. And even if that job site escapes additional downtime and damages, such behavior will not solve the issue of late locates.

Clearly, with the impact of broadband and the infrastructure bill in general, locators and their companies are an easy topic of discussion. And mostly, it is a discussion that involves late locates, mismarked utility lines and understaffed companies.

As a result of such discussions, the excavating community and the underground facility owners themselves seem to undervalue locators as a whole, and seemingly, very few people understand the obstacles that must be overcome to get the job site located in a timely fashion.

Recently a national study funded by a multi-stakeholder group that included excavators, utility associations and the national utility locator association identified one of the greatest sources of waste and cost overruns largely was created when utility locators and/or third-party locators are routinely sent out to locate lines for construction projects that then do not happen, unclear instructions given to locators and projects called in with no boundaries causing wasted time or additional work; locate marks destroyed by construction and then needing to be remarked. Many times, the wait times are self-inflicted, in part because the locator and the excavator are not on the same page.

Is getting on the same page a possibility in these tense times? Yes, it is and let me give you an example. Recently, I received several complaints from a nationally known excavation company. They submitted these complaints against a large utility company who had secured the services of a third-party locating company. The complaints were levied against the utility for failing to respond to a locate request. Upon investigation, I found that neither group had the other group's contact information. As you can imagine, frustration set in and complaints followed closely behind. Getting the two sides together and getting out of their way proved to be helpful to both sides.

Many times, the wait times are self-inflicted, in part because the locator and the excavator are not on the same page.

They had a lot of things in common. Neither side wanted damages, both sides wanted to make sure that marks were down and accurate. The one thing they didn't have was neither supervisor had the other supervisor's cell phone number, so they couldn't communicate with one another.

Following that first face to face meeting, both sides sat down and worked out an agreed-upon plan together to ensure better communication in the future. Not only that but with a good

faith effort, both sides agreed that the civil penalties that would have almost assuredly been levied against the utility company would not serve either side's purpose.

My phone rang a few days later. It was the excavator who stated that their meeting was productive and that they had a really good conversation. He then wanted to know if it was possible to withdraw the earlier complaints that would have resulted in civil penalties for the utility company represented by the locating company. I explained that the complaint could be rescinded by notifying the Executive Secretary in writing his desire to withdraw the complaint.

So. The question is asked, "In this particular case, did enforcement play a part in the resolution?" Probably helped in some ways, but even more importantly, the goal of enforcement was served by the two stakeholder groups getting together and arriving at a workable plan for both sides.

It is often said that the goal of enforcement is to foster better communication and to change behaviors. Both of those goals can be accomplished without enforcement as in this example. Enforcement is not for those who are willing to work together, but it is necessary for those who will not come to the table.

These locators will still face significant obstacles in the field that all locators face. Crowded right of ways and the close proximity of utility lines to one another makes locating very difficult. Commonly bonded utilities make for a difficult day in that it is often hard to identify the target line. The depth of the utility creates a real challenge to locating lines. Unreasonable timelines on large projects, including locating entire subdivisions within the locate by time and then finding out you can't contact someone on site to try and meet the demands of the locate request are an everyday occurrence for many locators.

And then in the midst of such chaos, the opportunity to work together with the excavator on a level playing field happens and the world is at peace, if only for a moment. We actually begin to believe that this is a worthwhile effort.

And for one very good reason... It is! 



The Story Behi

By Roger Cox
President
ACTS Now, Inc.

In our world of paint, stakes and flags, most of us have heard of FlagShooter. When you see someone using the FlagShooter, you think to yourself, “that’s pretty cool” and those who’ve used it, often talk about how much time they save at a locate site or even how much it saves their back.

I’m just a little different. The first time I ran across someone using the FlagShooter, I thought to myself, “Now who in the world came up with this idea and what were they smoking?” Turns out they weren’t smoking anything, but I did find out who invented the FlagShooter.

Paul Carrette, the inventor of the device, the flags it shoots and owner of the company sat down with me recently to tell his story. Let me share it with you.

What is your background? Paul responded, “I am a mechanical engineer by schooling. I was working in an industry that built industrial plants. Certainly nothing really associated with locating or flags in any way. I came home from work one day and saw a guy getting out of his truck carrying a locating device, paint stick, paint and a

collection of flags. I watch him for a bit and as he placed flags in the ground, I asked him if there wasn’t a better way of doing that. It looked too much like a three handed job and very cumbersome. He said, ‘not that I know of.’ So, it just got me to thinking about the process he was having to go through and I simply couldn’t get it off my mind. I remember searching Google for best ways to place locate flags. You know it’s not all that unusual for innovation to take place outside of an industry. For some reason, I just couldn’t get it out of my head and began to experiment with different ideas in my shop. Folks who know me very well, will tell you that when I see things happening, I routinely ask myself ‘why are they doing it that way and I wonder if there is a better way to do it?’”

Ok, now has this become an obsession and what are you going to do with it if you figure it out? He continued, “Right! Some might call it an obsession but working with this project that is beginning to consume me, I was at a crossroad. Do I stay with my full-time job which has been very good to me, or do I take a leap of faith to see where this idea will lead me? I was at the point where I felt like God was asking

me, ‘Are you going to do this or am I going to give this to someone else?’ So, my wife and I prayed about it and we made the decision to pursue this, whatever this was. It has been good for me to remember that this was not my idea. I was just chosen to build it.”

You made the decision to pursue this new path. What did that look like?

He chuckled and said, “A lot of late nights and a lot of thinking about the project and where do I go from here. You can imagine that when you’re inventing or doing something that’s never been done before, your mind doesn’t stop. It’s always fun but it’s always with you. I quit my job in 2008, so sometime in late 2008/early 2009 I created a prototype of the FlagShooter you see today. Finally, after crawling up a very steep learning curve, late one night about 2:00am, I shot two flags in a row. It was exhilarating! I’d just done something that nobody had ever done before. I was so excited that I rushed into the house and woke up my wife and said, ‘Anita, can I show you something?’ She said yes and followed me into the backyard. I shot three flags in a row and she said, ‘Oh honey! That’s great... Good night.’ And she went back to bed. Although, she headed back into the house that morning,



nd FlagShooter

she has been my biggest cheerleader throughout the entire process.”

It worked in your backyard, now what? Paul said, “Well, it did work, but we didn’t know if anybody would buy it or find it useful. Initially, in case someone did see value in it, there was the patent process we had to go through and then how do we market it if that becomes necessary. I hired our first employee in January of 2010. Most of the industry knows that our first employee was Bob Bishop who was a great asset to me for many years. By the end of 2010, we began to make the trade shows. We began to get orders. So, now was the time to start building the units. We had an assembly party in my shop to fill orders that began to trickle in.”

Did you also manufacture the special flags? “Interestingly enough” he said, “that was not my vision. But we realized early on that we’d have to get in the middle of manufacturing flags as well as the shooter. There were a lot of lessons to learn during this phase. When things went wrong, we realized that we couldn’t call tech support... we were the tech support. So, we learned a lot. Through 2011, we were filling some orders and learning how to manufacture flags. Then we began

to get reorders. That was exciting because to us it meant that what we had done was working and loyalties began to develop. Strategically early on, we wanted to work within a five-state region. My thinking was if there are problems, I want to be able to get to the customer and resolve the issue personally. And that proved to be the right move. Once we became comfortable with how rugged the unit was, it was time to expand.

Are you where you thought you’d be? Paul smiled as he said, “Not sure where I thought we’d be, but initially I thought folks would gravitate toward the safety benefits of the FlagShooter. Especially, saving their backs from having to bend over and even more so in hard ground. But what we failed to fully appreciate was that the locators saw an equal benefit in the amount of time they saved because now they could shoot flags in either the frozen ground or the driest ground that they encounter. I believe those are two major reasons that we have over 8,000 FlagShooters in the field nationwide and we continue to produce and ship millions of flags every year.”

Looking ahead, what’s next? Paul slowly answered, “First, we want to

take care of those companies and individuals who have been so loyal to us. That will always be our first commitment. Having said that, I see myself as an innovator, a designer as someone who wants to provide solutions where issues arise. We’re working on some ideas now. One thing some folks may not know is that we are a very large producer of straight flags. It makes sense, right? A lot of folks use flags that don’t use a FlagShooter, so we can meet their needs as well. Currently, FlagShooter flags are in all colors, including white. As laws change requiring premarking proposed excavation sites in white, we’ve noticed many excavators are moving to the FlagShooter, in large part because how much time they can save when marking in white. There are other opportunities out there as well. We want to continue listening to the experts in the field. More than likely, they’ll tell us what needs to be done next. And I want to be in that conversation.”

Closing thoughts. Thanks Paul! You are truly a great storyteller, innovator and dream chaser. For those of you who haven’t had the opportunity to meet Paul or connect with FlagShooter, check out their website at www.flagshooter.com. 



Vermeer® Texas-Louisiana



The folks at Vermeer of Texas-Louisiana had an Open House at the Airline Hwy location in Baton Rouge on May 4. It was a great experience for all concerned. They provided class sessions and a training session which allowed hands-on use of the equipment in a virtual setting along with several giveaway items. The hospitality was at its best when at noon they topped the session off with south Louisiana “mudbugs.” It simply does not get any better than that.

Many thanks to Blake Torrence, Branch Manager, Melyssa Prince, Marketing Director, and Chris May, Regional Sales Manager with Vermeer MV Solutions who took me on a tour of the state-of-the-art equipment around the yard.

As always, all the folks at Vermeer extended a warm welcome and allowed me the opportunity to fit right in. 📞

By Freddie Shows, Director of Sales, 8u Magazines



CenterPoint Energy Recognizes Vanguard Utility Partners for Top Performance in 2022 at Annual Locate Partner Summit



CenterPoint headquarters in Houston, Texas



Left to Right - Shane Alexander, Steve Greenly and Randy Bern

CenterPoint Energy hosted its second annual Contract Locator Vendor Summit in Houston, TX. The event brought together key leaders from each of CenterPoint's locating vendors from across all regions. The vendors met with CenterPoint team members to discuss policy, procedures, and metrics in place to strengthen quality line locating, excavator education, and overall performance to keep our communities safe.

Shane Alexander, Director of Damage Prevention, Public Awareness and Meter Reading, opened with CenterPoint's Damage Prevention mission and goals for 2023. By analyzing data trends, CenterPoint plans to identify risks and create plans to mitigate those risks as we meet the increasing demands of line locating.

The 2022 Locate Vendor of the Year was awarded to the Vanguard Utility Partners team for their outstanding performance of all the locate partners for that year. CNP has specific metrics in place to highlight damage prevention efforts across the communities we serve. "Our locate partners are key ambassadors in our damage prevention efforts, and we are happy to recognize those that excel," said Alexander.

"Our customers value quality, on time performance and the team at Vanguard is honored to be recognized as the top performer," said Randy Bern, President & CEO of Vanguard. "CNP has established an industry standard for damage prevention that enables us to manage and maintain quality locates."

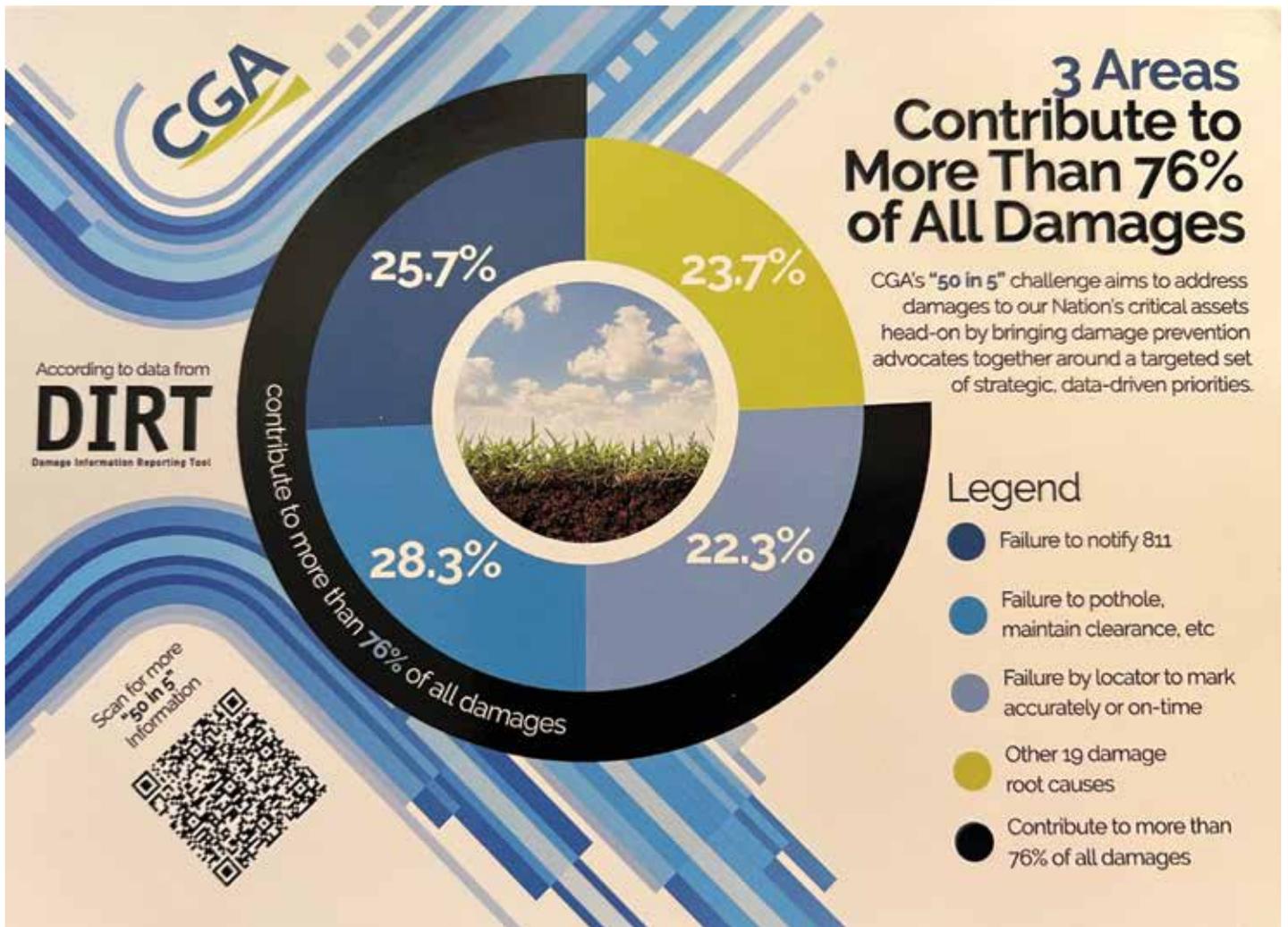
The group also reviewed damage data by work type to understand which audiences need further messaging to improve damage rates. Each month the locate vendors share their performances with CenterPoint, which allows CenterPoint to create dashboards and scorecards that analyze the data. These tools help create visuals and metrics that are easy to understand from a vast amount of data. Moving forward, the Damage Prevention team plans to share this data with vendors more frequently so that everyone involved can monitor damage prevention rates and make an impact in their region. 



UL-Monroe baseball and softball sponsorship



LA811 provides safety materials for System Services' quarterly safety day





L to R: LA811 Board of Directors Members Quinn Bush (Boardwalk Pipeline), Brandi Schmitt (Entergy), Wesley Hawley (Atmos Energy)



LA811 invited to help celebrate IMPETUS' annual Safe Day



LA811 at System Services' quarterly safety day

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AUG 14-17, 2023 | HILTON RIVERSIDE, NEW ORLEANS, LA

FIND MORE INFO AT LOUISIANAGAS.ORG/PSC

MORE UPCOMING 2023 LGA EVENTS

Scholarship Golf Tournament
May 18 | Jennings, LA

Annual Operations Conference
November 5-8 | Vidalia, LA

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Two Main Ingredients

By Joe Igel

Some years ago, my wife and I purchased some trees at a very reputable nursery and arranged for them to be delivered and planted. As we were paying for them, I was handed two small white flags and was told to place them where we wanted the trees planted. I was comfortable until I was told they would be out the next day (a Sunday) to plant them. I asked how they were going to get locate markings in time for the excavation and they said that it was my job to do that. Delaying the planting allowed us to call which protected us but not the landscaper. I learned that this practice was not uncommon in the business and worked with OH811 field personnel to change it.

The Ohio Underground Technical Committee, within the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, is charged with enforcing the dig laws in the State of Ohio. I was privileged to sit on the committee writing the legislation that created it and am privileged to sit on the committee as well.

Last year alone, we heard over one hundred cases and the number grows every year. I frequently am asked, "What are the main complaints you see?". Amazingly, with the devotion to details when drafting what we wanted, with all the follow up, the primary complaints remain as they have been for years:

1. Failure of the excavator to call or notify.
2. Failure of the utility to locate or respond.

There are other issues that come before us, but these are by far the primary ones. But why are they still a problem?

Failure of the Excavator to Call or Notify

The message getting to the excavator is obviously incomplete. Despite advertising on media outlets, in the mail, on billboards, the message is failing to strike its target. Many performing excavation do not understand what constitutes excavation under the law and what their obligations are (as noted in the opening of this article). We do exempt certain activities but rarely is any digging an exempt activity. "We were not digging that deep" or "the utility was too shallow" are frequently seen in the response. Landowners do not understand that utilities, both privately and publicly owned can pass through their property. And the list goes on.

There is a substantial amount of outreach to potential excavators, but the message needs to be rethought and the delivery mechanism even more so. To communicate more effectively with those performing excavation, there needs to be a simple, clear message stated by everyone. I know we have done this repeatedly, but any excavation should have it—to heck with any exemptions or exceptions. Renting or purchasing anything that excavates, there should be a message. Farm bureaus should send a message to their members. If purchasing a mailbox online to install at home, there should be a warning. And if buying a tree to be planted, the same.

Failure of the Utility to Locate or Respond

The number of locate requests rises dramatically every year. Thus, the demand for locates rises while the workforce is insufficient to manage it. The matter is further complicated by a mixed message on the need for remarks and refreshes being sent to excavators. All of this drives up demand and excavators are not able to get what they require to perform their work.

Their frustration is real. Work crews show up on-site to find an absence of marks, or an inaccurate response via the positive response system and the result is the need to postpone and reschedule. We have witnessed delays measured in days, not hours. And this costs the excavator, the project owner and frequently all of us.

To get needed markings for planned excavation, the solution is a bit more complicated and many of the excavators succeeding are the ones that have reached out to the utilities, met with third-party locators, been proactive in working through issues. While filing a formal complaint for lack of compliance with the law is a right and often necessary or required, the ultimate result has to be accurate and complete utility markings as promised and by the deadline. Flexibility on the part of all parties can accomplish this goal. Issuing a fine, even repeatedly, is after the fact.

I have seen the fruits of many sit-downs between the parties and they have yielded improved results and many long-term improvements. After all, utility companies are frequently excavators themselves and in those cases, fall under the same excavating requirements. As I have discussed in past articles, when I entered the damage prevention and underground utility protection arena, it seemed like a war was being waged. And in a war, there are generally casualties. Do not underestimate the power and profitability of a sit-down. 

Mr. Igel retired as vice president of the George J. Igel & Co., Inc. after working there for more than 35 years.



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the Orange Shoe Man



By Bob Nighswonger

What Makes a Great Line Locator?

If we stop and take a look at the characteristics of great line locating technicians, we can identify a few common traits. Anyone performing line locating should be able to operate their line finding equipment by the book. This is considered Locating Basics 101. A person off of the street can be taught to operate a piece of locating equipment in a few hours, but if that's all they know, then they only know just enough to be dangerous. It's like teaching a person to use a hammer or saw and calling them a carpenter. A great locator is a person who can not only use the equipment but also prevent damages well beyond operating equipment. Damage prevention minded locators can juggle a very tricky schedule to keep up with the demand, have heightened sense of their surroundings, excellent reasoning skills and be a great communicator.

Schedule Juggler

We all would like to be the master of our schedule, but often times we fall short. A great locator is a great juggler of time. We can try to predict but can't control the number of 811 requests that are called in on any given day. We can try to predict but can't control exactly how much time each job will take to complete. When faced with such a short deadline to complete a locating job, time is a precious commodity. A typical day in the life of a locating technician requires a line locator to create a productive route to try to cover the ticket load and often re-route throughout the day when called to an emergency or if one job that should have taken twenty minutes to complete ended up taking two hours to

complete due to a variety of problem locate scenarios.

Good Eyes

The most important tool in a locator's arsenal is his eyes. A good visual of the jobsite is one of the most important steps of a line locate. A visual inspection



is used to first evaluate any safety hazards that may be present onsite, visually confirm the dig area and read the facts and clues combined with reasoning to determine how the area is piped and wired and if there may be other lines on the site that may present troubles. A good visual site survey may

also identify if there are additional lines buried on site.

Good Communicator

As a locator, about 9 out of 10 times, the details provided on my locate tickets were enough information for me to find the jobsite, identify the dig area and locate my lines. The fact that I normally left the shop in the morning with around 20 tickets per day meant that 1 or 2 of my locate tickets would take a follow-up call to clarify the information provided by the caller. The call normally clarified the location of the site and or dig area. A common problem faced by myself and many of my fellow locators is a contact phone number that doesn't work or the contact person calling in the ticket has no idea where the dig site is or even the name of the foreman assigned to the job. Often times I spent more time trying to find the location than I did locating the lines on the site, especially when locating in states that did not require white markings. It's during times like these that being a good communicator is especially important.

The hammer does not build the house, the carpenter does. The line locating equipment does not prevent line strikes, the operator of the equipment does. A great line locator is damage prevention minded and will go that extra mile to ensure no line strikes. 811

Bob Nighswonger is the President and CEO of Utility Training Academy. Bob has over 25 years of experience in the field of utility locating and damage prevention. For questions or comments, Bob can be reached at bob@utasearch.com.

the **JACOBI** P E R S P E C T I V E

By John Jacobi

Location!! Location!! Location!!

How many times have you heard those three words as related to real estate? They also relate to aboveground utilities, underground utilities and especially pipelines.

First, what is a utility? For purposes of this discussion, anything that moves something from one place to another or is related to movement of goods or services. Can you say roads, railroads, rivers, lakes, oceans, wires, fiber cables, airports, or pipelines? Second, what is being moved? Anything – information; electricity, gasses, liquids (hazardous or not); goods (hazardous or not) and even people.

The essential element – moving something from one place to another – transportation.

Question (not rhetorical): Which would you rather live next to: An interstate highway; a railroad; an airport; or an underground pipeline? The answer: It depends.

Locating transportation these days is a BIG problem. Can you say, “Not in MY back yard”?

Location is important. Everyone wants to be able to get to and from work, to and from shopping, to and from medical care, to and from friends and family, to and from recreation quickly, etc., etc., etc. quickly and efficiently (cheaply?). Almost nobody wants the hazards associated with transportation – air pollution, water pollution, congestion, scenic disruption, traffic, whatever.

There are utility corridors almost everywhere anyone lives in the United States. Above ground utilities are easy to see and it is easy to recognize many of the dangers associated with above ground utilities. Underground utilities are a horse of a different color. When you stick a shovel in the ground, it is extremely important to try to identify what is below ground. If there is something that can cause injury (besides a sore back or the hole caving in on you), you might want to know

Underground utilities are a horse of a different color.

about it and be a little more careful. Bottom line, if you are digging, call 811 to get underground utilities marked, wait for the “all clear” or the utilities to be marked, and, if there are utilities marked, be even more careful when digging near the marks.

Last year a neighbor wanted me to chip in and pay for half of a common fence between our properties. I agreed and I very specifically told her that she needed to “call before you dig.” I also very specifically told her “shade tree”

fencing contractor that he needed to “CALL BEFORE YOU DIG!!” I even called 811 with the contractor standing there but he was not ready to pull a one-call ticket. No call was ever made. They hit a utility-owned service line (NOT on MY property) and caused a gas leak. They were lucky, no one was injured and there was no fire. The utility that performed the repairs charged almost \$1,000. (Judging by the number of personnel that was involved, the equipment that was mobilized, and the time that they were on site, the utility did not charge enough.)

Talk about a near miss!! Accidents do NOT care about your politics. And accidents can happen almost anywhere. Be aware of your surroundings and **IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!!** In the words of Ron White (a comedian), “You can’t fix stupid.” But shame on you if you don’t at least try.

Postscript: Last column, I mentioned that by law dated December 23, 2022, PHMSA was required by Congress to issue a final rule on automatic and remote-controlled shut-off valves no later than April 22, 2023 or get docked \$5,000 per day. As of March 27, 2023, crickets. Anyone want to place a bet that PHMSA will get the rule in place by April 22nd?

We live in strange times. Be safe out there!! 🚒

*John Jacobi retired from PHMSA.
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