
California Underground Facilities Safe Excavation Board

May 11, 2021

Agenda Item No. 8 (Information Item) – Staff Report

Update on Safety Standards

PRESENTER

Tom Finn, Operations Manager

SUMMARY

In 2020, the Board outlined a general framework for developing safety standards going excavation subtype by subtype beginning with trenchless excavation techniques. What we have previously referred to as Reasonable Care Standards we are now terming safety standards as this terminology more accurately reflects the work we are doing. While the Board's intention at the time was to develop standards for a subtype before moving on to the next subtype, the recommended revised approach would move standards development until after a more comprehensive understanding of various excavation subtypes has been completed. After conducting surveys, workgroups, and other research into relevant excavation subtypes, the Board will be better equipped to determine what general standards may be applied universally, and which subtypes may need their own standards. The Safety Standards Committee proposes to begin this new approach starting with roadbuilding and grading with outreach to industry stakeholders, workshops, and an online survey beginning later this month.

BACKGROUND

Statute

Statute¹ requires the Board to “develop a standard or set of standards relevant to safety practices in excavating around subsurface installations and procedures and guidance in encouraging those practices.” These standards are “not intended to replace other relevant standards... but are to inform areas currently without established standards.”

¹ [Gov't Code § 4216.18](#)

Board Meetings

The Board discussed a general framework for safety standards on July 13, 2020² and outlined a general framework for developing safety standards focused on different methods, types of excavation, and stakeholder groups in the excavation industry beginning with trenchless excavation.

On August 10, 2020³, staff announced a workshop and survey on trenchless excavation. Staff presented preliminary results on September 14, 2020⁴ and results of the survey and two workshops on November 16, 2020⁵. Through this process, the Reasonable Care Committee learned about the complex practices, technologies, and communications around these methods to safely install utilities. The survey and workshops demonstrated that there are many overlapping topics between the subtypes of excavation such as project owner requirements, abandoned lines, on-site meetings, and methods for determining the exact location of facilities. The plan at the time was to complete developing standards for this excavation subtype before moving on to the next one.

DISCUSSION

Through the information gathering process into trenchless excavation techniques, it became clear that there is some overlap in safety practices which apply universally and other safety practices applicable only to certain excavation subtypes. Absent a more complete understanding of how standards might impact other excavation subtypes, it would be premature to develop safety standards before completing research into the other subtypes. By identifying points of crossover/divergence and equipped with a more comprehensive understanding of best practices and safety concerns, the Board will be better equipped to pursue standards development.

The proposed recommendation would have the Board next pursue information gathering into the excavation subtype of roadbuilding. Staff is prepared to proceed with a similar format as before by conducting outreach and preliminary research in advance of surveys and workshops planned for the following dates:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| May 18, 2021 | Survey Release and Outreach Campaign begins |
| June 9, 2021 | Teleconference Workshop |
| July 21, 2021 | Teleconference Workshop II |

As with trenchless excavation, Staff propose a phone campaign to drive

² [July 13-14, 2020, Agenda Item No. 7, Discussion on Reasonable Care Standards Development](#)

³ [August 10-11, 2020, Agenda Item No. 6, Discussion of Reasonable Care Standards Workshop](#)

⁴ [September 14, 2020, Agenda Item No. 18, Discussion on Reasonable Care Standards Development for Trenchless Excavation Techniques](#)

⁵ [November 16, 2020, Agenda Item No. 9, Update on Reasonable Care Standards Development for Trenchless Excavation Techniques](#)

involvement with organizations involved in all stages of roadbuilding from project owners, to engineers, to contractors in an effort to solicit their participation in the surveys and workshops. Additional stakeholder groups identified for outreach include the League of California Cities, American Public Works Association, and American Road and Builders Transportation Association. Information gathering will continue later in the year around the two subtypes of open-cut trenching and piercing excavation (such as posts, signs, fencing, and grounding rods).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board proceed with information gathering on excavation subtypes beginning with the topic of roadbuilding before it proceeds with standards development.