

California Underground Facilities

Safe Excavation Board

Item #1

Agenda Item – Staff Report

DATE: February 22, 2018
TO: Members, Underground Facilities Safe Excavation Board
FROM: Zak Trammell, Analyst
SUBJECT: Incident Reporting

SUMMARY:

Roughly five thousand incidents involving excavation damage to natural gas pipelines occur annually in California.¹ Thousands more are known to impact the state's other subsurface installations.² Of these, however, only about 100 are reported in a timely manner to the state's Public Utilities Commission,³ with a handful of others reported to the Office of the State Fire Marshall. State authorities who depend on voluntary reporting receive only a handful of reports and thus investigate dramatically fewer incidents than state authorities who require it, so some form of reporting process will need to be adopted through regulation in advance of investigators beginning work at the beginning of 2019.

BACKGROUND:

More than half of states do not require mandatory incident reporting at the state level. Those states that do require reporting typically only require the utility operator to report the occurrence of an incident. Some states, like Maryland, may inadvertently discourage incident reporting by levying a fee on the individual who submits a report. A few states who have been at the forefront of excavation damage prevention require mandatory reporting by both the utility operator and excavator (Indiana, Texas, and Virginia). The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has taken the position that all utility operators, excavators, locators, and any other stakeholder should report an incident.⁴

Of the states who require reporting most have laws which state an incident must be reported upon discover, but does not mention a specific time frame in which the report must be submitted, such as in Texas a report must be made within two hours of

¹ California Regional Common Ground Alliance, "2015 Facilities Event Report."

² Common Ground Alliance, 2017 Damage Incident Reporting Tool Interactive Tool.
<http://commongroundalliance.com/dirt-2016-interactive-report/>

³ Crowe Horwath, *Gas Safety and Reliability Branch Management and Operations Review: Report and Recommendations*, February 23, 2015, p. 1-6.

⁴ Department of Transportation Office of Pipeline Safety, *Common Ground: A Study of One-Call Systems and Damage Prevention Best Practices*, August 1999, pp. 148-159; PHMSA, *A Study on Improving Damage Prevention Technology*, August 3, 2017, pp. 29-30.

discovery. Many states require either monthly, semi-annual, or annual incident report submittal. Reports such as these that are submitted days and even months after an incident occurred do not lend themselves to investigational purposes. Time frames for “immediate” reporting vary from two hours to seventy-two hours depending on the state. The states who require reporting near the two-hour marker tend to not only have more investigations but more investigations that result in regulatory outcome rather than being dismissed.

All incident reporting forms tend to require the same essential information; date, time, location, parties involved, work being done, description of damage, and perceived reason incident occurred. This basic information is necessary, especially when immediate reporting is required. However, the more detail that is reported surrounding an incident the more information an investigator has to go on before visiting the site of the incident. States with the most effective excavation damage prevention programs, or greatest decrease in reported incidents from the time of program inception, require immediate reporting along with a secondary report which contain more details surrounding the incident. A secondary report containing information such as GPS coordinates of site and incident, descriptions of markings, utility down time, root causes, and other geographical information will result in investigations being more efficient and successful. To date no state has required exact GPS coordinates from utility operators, locators, or excavators.

Reporting thresholds vary greatly from state to state and utility to utility ranging from reporting near misses in Virginia, to only having to report incidents which result in damages of \$50,000 or more in California. The reporting of near misses does not primarily lend itself to investigations but can be useful as background information in future incident investigations. The trend across states who require mandatory reporting is that the excavation damage prevention program investigators primarily focus on reported incidents that involve property damage exceeding \$10,000, a significant number of persons effected, release of hazardous liquid or gas, personal injury or fatality, and high-priority utilities.

Workshop Questions

1. Who should be required to report when an incident occurs?
2. How long should someone have to submit a report?
3. What level of detail should be used in a report?
4. What should be the threshold for reporting?