



# 811 Underground Utility Safety & Damage Prevention Process Survey

Recently AGC of America conducted an 811 underground utility safety and damage prevention process (811 process) survey of heavy water/wastewater, highway/bridge, telecom, gas transmission and distribution, energy infrastructure contractors. The purpose of the survey is to provide an accurate accounting of the professional excavator/construction industry's' experience with the 811 process.

The survey results make it clear, there is room for improvement by all stakeholders. All stakeholders, particularly facility owner/operators, must be held accountable for failing to execute their responsibilities in the process. Often these failures are the root cause of damages that occur during excavation activities.

Key findings of the survey show:

- 99% of professional excavators are familiar with their local 811 program/requirements
- 73% of respondents found weaknesses in the 811 process
- Top 3 weakest elements in the 811 process:
  - 78% of respondents identified the lack of accurate utility locating by facility owner/operators as the weakest element
  - 56% identified utility owner/operator response time as the weakest element
  - 52% identified wait time for facility owner/operators to clear a locate request as the weakest element
- 98% of respondents found excavators/the construction industry should have vested representation on 811 center boards of directors
- 43% found abandoned facilities are seldom marked by utility owner/operators and treated as live lines
- 53% of respondents found unmarked/mismarked facilities by facility owner/operators in response to a locate request as the most frequent cause of damages and near miss events
- 66% of respondents have received a claim or invoice from a facility owner/operator for a damage to an existing facility they were not responsible for
- 57% of respondents include AGC's [Elements of an Effective Underground Utility Excavation Safety and Damage Prevention Program and Record Keeping, Incidents/Damages Reporting](#) in their overall safety programs

The 811 process involves multiple stakeholders, each with grave responsibilities they must execute properly for the overall process to work. Facility owner/operators must be members of their local 811 center, have up-to-date maps of the facility locations and competent technicians locating and marking their facilities accurately. One call centers are the communication hub for the process and must reliably take locate requests in detail and pass them on to owner/operators to act on; and finally, the excavator must have an effective program in place to communicate with other stakeholders and deal with existing



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facilities on the jobsite. Stakeholders not executing their respective responsibilities in the process invite danger, compromise public and workforce safety and threaten the integrity of vital facilities.

Over the past 2 years, there have been widely reported breakdowns in the 811 Process across the nation due to facility owner/operators' failure to respond to tens of thousands of locate requests required by law. As examples, the breakdowns include 78,000 late or no-show responses in Minnesota, 30,000 in Arizona,<sup>(1)</sup> and 20,000 in Michigan.<sup>(2)</sup> A major facility owner/operator agreed to pay \$65 million to settle claims that they falsified records and misrepresented response time to excavators' requests to locate and mark gas lines.<sup>(3)</sup>

In addition to compromising public and workforce safety, it is estimated the economic impact in the U.S. from breakdowns in the 811 process is \$30 billion in annual societal costs, which includes direct (facility repair) and indirect (property damage, medical expenses, business closures, etc.) costs.<sup>(4)</sup>

There are many surveys and data repositories that claim to tell the professional excavators'/construction industries' story in the 811 process. Many of the conclusions in those sources are heavily influenced by facility owner/operators, their locators and other process stakeholders. In addition, they include data on non-professional excavators, such as homeowners and landscapers, and group them in with professional excavators' data when compiling statistics, clearly skewing the results.

We hope the results of the survey will help our chapters and members tell their story as they work to ensure workforce and public safety, protect vital facilities, engage in the 811 process and work to better states' 811 programs, laws and regulations.

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1 David Wichner, "CenturyLink backlog on blue-stake requests delaying construction projects," Arizona Daily Star, July 29, 2019 available at: [https://tucson.com/news/local/centurylink-backlog-on-blue-stake-requests-delaying-construction-projects/article\\_8210c9fd-72b1-5b6c-abf0-0e0710515b59.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/centurylink-backlog-on-blue-stake-requests-delaying-construction-projects/article_8210c9fd-72b1-5b6c-abf0-0e0710515b59.html)

2 Bill Laitner, "Consumers Energy could face big fine for massive MISS DIG snafu," Detroit Free Press, July 1, 2019, available at: <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/oakland/2019/07/01/consumers-energy-michigan-utility-violation-miss-dig-fine-gas-electric/1591531001/>

3 David Krause, "Judge Increases PG&E Locate-and-Mark Penalty, Cites Severe Wrongdoing," California Energy Markets, Jan. 24, 2020, available at: [https://www.newsdata.com/california\\_energy\\_markets/regulation\\_status/judge-increases-pg-e-locate-and-mark-penalty-cites-severe-wrongdoing/article\\_c8a27072-3ed7-11ea-98f0-17a5ce1f12c2.html](https://www.newsdata.com/california_energy_markets/regulation_status/judge-increases-pg-e-locate-and-mark-penalty-cites-severe-wrongdoing/article_c8a27072-3ed7-11ea-98f0-17a5ce1f12c2.html)

4 Common Ground Alliance Damage Information Reporting Tool, 2020 Analysis & Recommendations, available at: [https://commongroundalliance.com/Portals/0/2020%20DIRT%20Report\\_09.29.2021\\_Final4.pdf?ver=2021-11-03-143123-490](https://commongroundalliance.com/Portals/0/2020%20DIRT%20Report_09.29.2021_Final4.pdf?ver=2021-11-03-143123-490)