

# Underground Utilities

Utilities are everywhere and can be public, private, underground, overhead, and within buildings. They are a particular concern when demolition or initial excavation activities get underway. In addition to public utilities in the right-of-way, there can be utilities specific to a customer's operations on their property, including buried fiber optic cables, power, phone, cable, water, sewer, gas lines, steam pipes, etc. Damaging utilities can lead to large claims, including property damage, personal injury, or business interruption. Utility strikes may occur because the contractor's crew was unaware the utility existed or failed to verify its location.

One-call systems have been established throughout the U.S. and can be easily accessed. These systems provide contractors with a reliable process to comply with local, applicable laws. However, not every company with underground utilities is a member of the local one-call system. Therefore, contractors are always encouraged to conduct a pre-construction site survey to look for signs of possible buried utilities. Furthermore, company representatives need to communicate and work closely with property owners and companies to identify and develop an accurate scope of the underground systems (e.g., irrigation systems and storage tanks).

No matter how minor the damage, the proper authorities need to be contacted to ensure a safe response and corrective action if necessary. Additionally, the crew should never attempt to make repairs themselves. Any and all repairs to a damaged utility should be made by authorized personnel. Controls include:

- Developing an EAP or emergency response plan (including a crisis communication plan)
- Providing the crew on-site with emergency numbers (e.g., fire department, EMS, utility companies, and local authorities) and instructing them what to do if the utility hit occurs before starting any activity
- Calling your local utility location service or checking the website [Call811.com](http://Call811.com) for state-specific information
- Conducting pre-construction surveys to identify utility locations
- Contacting non-members of the public utility-locating service and building/property owners to discuss the location of their utilities before starting work
- Holding joint meetings with the utility owner, the locating company, municipality, and other appropriate stakeholders, and maintaining documentation of these meetings
- Having crews "pothole" to verify actual utility locations and depth or use a vacuum truck for soil removal to expose the utility
- Maintaining documentation of dig numbers provided by the public locating service, dates the service was called, and date when calls need to be made to refresh the marks
- Taking photos or videos of the area where underground utilities have been located before any excavation work
- Conducting documented incident investigations of utility hits or near misses

For more information and additional risk management and prevention tools, visit: [fwcruminsurance.com](http://fwcruminsurance.com)