

Teamwork saves lives with 'Call Before You Dig' system

Co-operation is the key for Canadian Locators Inc., Alberta One-Call and utilities

Call Before You Dig.

We've all seen the slogan, and most of us are aware of the potentially grave consequences of ignoring that message.

But not many of us are aware of the tremendous teamwork that goes on behind the scenes to maximize the safety of the digging community.

And many of us take for granted the fact that this essential service is provided free of charge.

Here's how it works in Calgary:

A contractor or private homeowner who needs to disturb the ground makes a toll-free call to Alberta One-Call (800.242.3447), whose personnel produce an order ticket for a locate assignment.

That assignment is quickly forwarded to Canadian Locators Inc., which dispatches a trained professional to conduct the locate. Timeliness, as any contractor would attest, is critical.

Canadian Locators and Alberta One-Call work with an incredibly comprehensive mapping database to ensure optimal results for the locators. In 2001, CLI completed more than 200,000 notices, recording an accuracy rate in underground utility locating of more than 99.9 per cent. CLI's on-time locate ratio exceeded 99.5 per cent.

Technology plays a large role in CLI's efficiency. The company's Mercury Field Operations Management and Dispatching System is ideal for wireless data transfer, while CLI's LocatorBase.net™ is a utility industry portal that facilitates tracking, ticketing and reporting of utility locations across Canada from a centralized database system.

The locator marks the buried line – which could be fibre-optic cable, power line, gas mainline pipe, sewer, water and various other facilities – with paint or tape. He or she helps ensure a good map reading by the excavator, who is encouraged to dig prudently and use proper "hand-exposing" techniques.

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Dimitris Agouridis (third from right), CEO of CLI, is flanked on the outside by colleagues Aaron MacPhail (left) and Andrew Mark. On his right are Bob Chisholm and John Dyck of Alberta One-Call, on his left Wes Witherspoon of ATCO Gas.

"This program has been a huge success, and the primary reason is that every partner is completely committed to improving safety by preventing damage to underground facilities."

- Dimitris Agouridis, president & CEO, Canadian Locators Inc.

that every partner is completely committed to improving safety by preventing damage to underground facilities," explained Dimitris Agouridis, president and CEO of CLI.

"Alberta's robust economy has people digging at unprecedented rates, yet, despite a steadily increasing number of excavations, we have been able to significantly reduce damage incidents each year."

Bob Chisholm, president of Alberta One-Call, added: "The prevention of damage requires a genuine interest and concern for a successful outcome by all stakeholders in the digging community –

and that includes home and building owners, contractors, the owners of the buried facilities, landscapers, locators, Alberta One-Call and other regulatory agencies.

"Everyone involved is holding up their end of the deal. It's a co-operative, collaborative approach, with everyone working on improving the system."

Agouridis tipped his hat to the utilities for "subsidizing the safety of Albertans" without expecting any fanfare.

"The utilities in the consortium – which includes organizations such as ATCO Gas, ENMAX, the City of Calgary and TELUS – are paying for this vital service. In an era when individuals are even paying for ambulance service, that's really something!" he said.

Wes Witherspoon, general supervisor, Calgary South Operation, for ATCO Gas, said he and his colleagues are proud to be involved in a program that ultimately saves lives.

"As a group, all of the consortium members are concerned with having the best system possible," he said. "Our goal is zero damage. Now that's quite a goal, but the damage numbers are decreasing every year.

"We've got a lot of gas lines out

there, ENMAX has a lot of lines, and the list goes on. But we're all in it to improve safety, and the key is communication," he added.

"We are constantly communicating with each other and co-operating to solve any problems that arise."

Witherspoon noted that the professionalism of CLI's locators is a great asset for the program.

"The locators are well trained and they are there when we need them," he said. "They are getting the locates done in a timely and accurate manner."

Agouridis pointed out that today's "Call Before You Dig" model is vastly superior to the way things used to work.

"It used to be everyone looked after themselves and had their own locators," he explained. "But with up to 50 locators positioned throughout the city, we can get the locates done more efficiently, allowing the utilities to concentrate on what they do best."

Added Chisholm: "Things are busy out there, so it makes sense to utilize CLI through the One-Call system. There's a lot to be learned before being turned out to be a locator, and the locate is a make-or-break scenario. There are going to be problems if you don't do it right."