

# Underground

# FOCUS

the magazine of below-ground damage prevention

Underground Focus  
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**\$400,000 hit  
on clearly marked line  
results in innovative  
safety "ticket"**

*(See cover story on page 16)*

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## One-Call Tickets Used to Increase Safety Awareness

By Walt Kelly

Director - Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety

"I could give you fifteen reasons why it happened, and none of them make any sense," said the veteran contractor commenting on an accident where one of his workers drove a scraper over a well-marked Amoco pipeline recently.

The scraper ruptured the line an estimated 15,000 gallons of gasoline spilled into the ground in Brooklyn Park MN. By time the pipeline is repaired and all contaminated soil dug up and trucked away, the contractor could be holding a bill that approaches \$400,000.

One result is that the contractor is now using One-Call tickets as part of a safety measure to help prevent future accidents.

When the accident occurred, the contrac-

tor, Erin Contracting Company, was doing preliminary grading for a 250-acre subdivision. Jim Stanton, the company owner, was known to Pipeline Safety officials. He had been given a \$1,000 citation in late 1991 for digging without calling the Minnesota One-Call Center.

Since that time, however, Stanton's name had only come up once at the Office of Pipeline Safety, and that was in reference to other excavators complaining about him holding up jobs while waiting for lines to be located and marked. Stanton had been working hard to see that his wallet wasn't lightened by any further fines. His company became a documented frequent caller to the Gopher State One-Call Center, and he'd been strongly enforcing policies requiring his people to

always call before digging. Consequently, investigators arriving on the scene of the Brooklyn Park accident were surprised to see that Erin Contracting was involved.

Investigations revealed that although the pipeline was marked nearly everywhere in subdivision, there were some lots just outside the half dozen quarter sections reported to the One-Call Center. That's where the hit occurred. It is hoped that the new computerized mapping system scheduled to go on line at Gopher State One Call in the fall of 1993 will catch such situations. The PRISM system from One Call Concepts, which operates the Minnesota system, uses polygons to outline excavation sites rather than relying on quarter-section grids.

Meanwhile, Stanton will be cited for failure to provide a notice of excavation containing the precise location of the proposed area of excavation. This carries a \$500 penalty under Minnesota law.

Permanent pipeline warning markers were visible in the area. (See cover photo.) The crew just didn't react to them.

One possible reason was that although this was a veteran crew, it was the first day at this particular worksite. Their minds were probably focused on tasks associated with getting the job started. The boss had emphasized the line's presence to the foreman, but the foreman had not yet emphasized it to the crew. He expected the crew to be working in an area away from it, and wasn't present when they began working toward the line.

Still another factor is that people tend to be more alert to underground lines when they are actually digging. They're not  
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The blade of the scraper skimmed the top of the pipeline, while a guide tooth at the end of the blade went slightly deeper and gouged a hole in the line. The white rod is the end of a vacuum tool being used to clear the line prior to repair.

## Safety Awareness

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always as alert when they are primarily moving dirt as they were doing in this case. The scraper being used to move the dirt went just deep enough to hit the pipeline.

The accident clearly shows that warning markers by themselves are no guarantee of damage prevention. As a result, Stanton has taken further measures to make his crews alert to any underground lines at jobsites. A key is that each worker must have a copy of the One-Call ticket before going to work at a site. "They know that if they can't show me a ticket, they're 'going down the road' (fired)," Stanton says. "I tend to be dictatorial," he readily admits.

Stanton sees the ticket as a piece of critical communication. "It assures that everyone gets the big picture before they start work," he says. It's something concrete that helps make sure workers are alert to what's buried or might be buried

where they are working. With large ongoing jobs, there's periodic refreshing on this point.

While the three most important principles of real estate are "location, location and location," Stanton's new policy reflects the three most important principles of underground damage prevention—"communication, communication and communication."

In spite of the estimated \$400,000 cost of the Brooklyn Park accident, Stanton feels lucky that the gasoline was not ignited and no one was hurt. By using the One-Call tickets as part of a safety awareness exercise for his workers, he is not depending solely on luck to prevent future accidents. ■

*Note: The author will be participating in the 18th Annual International One Call and Damage Prevention Symposium. The event will be held April 4-7 at the Williamsburg (VA) Hilton. Kelly will be a member of a panel exploring the topic of damage prevention law enforcement.*

## Power Ram

(Continued from page 18)

Consumers Power Company, was impressed with the speed, accuracy, and safety features of the equipment used. "The shoring box not only stabilizes the pusher in the hole, but it also gives the operator a safe, clean environment to work in," said Gilbert.

During the push, the rods hit what sounded like buried concrete rubble, but they were not diverted. Assessing this and the soil conditions, Kline decided to do the pull-back in two steps. They first pulled a 5-inch diameter expander which pulled rods to reload the hole. Then they attached a 7 1/2 inch diameter expander with the 6-inch gas main secured directly behind. It took about 45 minutes to do these two pulls. The Klines obviously know what they are doing, because with a couple hours of work on a very inclement day, they successfully installed 70 feet of 6-inch gas main with little disruption to the city's streetscape. ■

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