

Maps of Dig Sites Reduce Damages

By Walt Kelly

The old cliché—: “A picture is worth a thousand words” takes on new life when locators can get a map of the dig site along with the regular ticket. People get even more excited about getting a sketch from the excavator showing exactly what area needs marking.

Carolyn Carter of the North Carolina One-Call Center says sending maps with tickets is: “Wonderful, wonderful!” Richard Tees, President of Info-Excavation in Montreal says: “When you don’t have sketches, people don’t know why you need them. But when they have had them, if you try to take the sketches away, they will kill you.”

North Carolina added mapping to their Norfield Data system just over a year ago. Excavators who use the Web-based ticket entry system have access to the mapping. They can pick the grids in which they want members notified. They can pick “1/4 minute” grids which are about 1,000’ x

1,500’, or can break one of these grids into 25 “gridlets” which are 264’ x 264’. Locators who receive their tickets by email can view the ticket on the screen. If they want the map, they just click on the “link” on the ticket and the map pops up. The locator can zoom in or out on the map to get the information they need, then print the ticket and/or map.

While some sketches visually describe a dig site out in the “boonies,” most sketches are valued for their ability to show the extent of marks needed at easily found addresses.

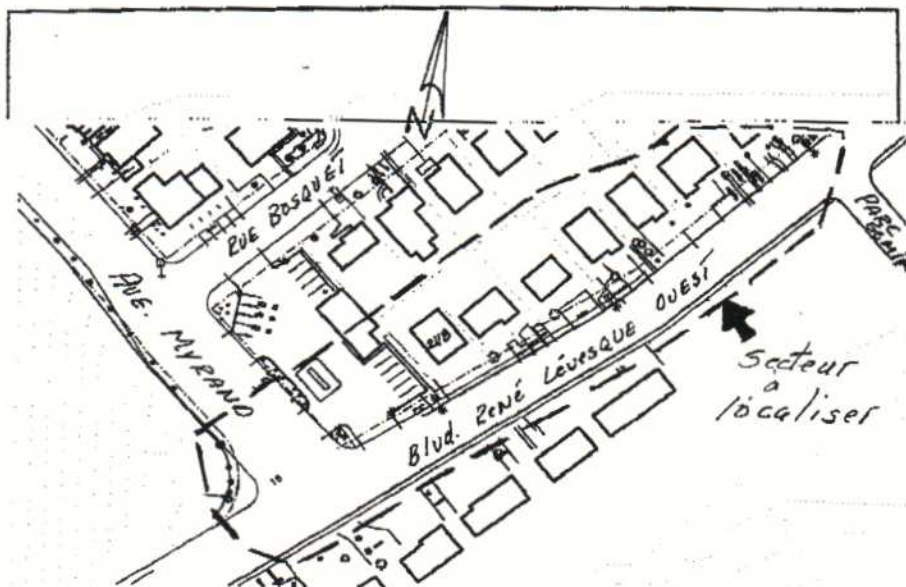
Excavators going cross-country like being able to pick the grids to be sure the

proper people get notified. Locators like it, too. Carolyn says one pipeline company had a 76 percent decrease in locate requests due to better gridding.

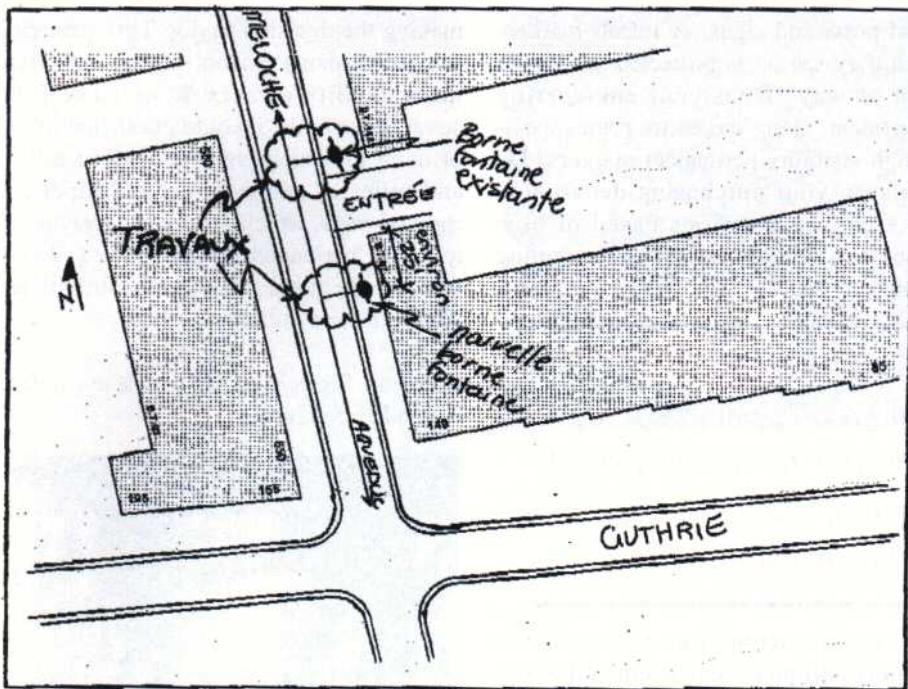
Not long after the Quebec center opened in 1993, excavators began sending sketches of the dig area along with the usual information on the Fax-a-Locate forms. The sketches made it easier for the Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) to process tickets. Richard says many centers operate at the Lowest Common Denominator - the line printer. He states that moving to faxes “Involves a commitment from end to end to stay compatible,” but the alternative “Is to stay in the dark ages forever.” Richard says 75 percent of tickets are faxed in, and over 50 percent of those have a sketch attached. While many sketches are hand drawn, more excavators are using computer drawn sketches. Only 25 percent of Quebec tickets are still done by phone call. (About 90 percent of all call centers listed in the 2001 One-Call Systems International Directory accept faxed locates.)

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While some sketches visually describe a dig site out in the “boonies,” most sketches are valued for their ability to show the extent of marks needed at easily found addresses. As the sample shows, two areas near fountains need marking. Premarking the dig area with white paint



Even if a locator did not read French, with this sketch, there is no question about exactly where the excavator needs marks. Around 40 percent of all excavation notifications in Quebec are accompanied by sketches.



The contractor who faxed this map sketch to the Quebec call center indicated new and existing fountain locations where marks are needed near the intersections of Meloche Avenue and Guthrie.

will reduce excess markouts, but having a sketch up front also assists in allotting the proper amount of time for this locate.

the communication between excavator and locator will improve. That will mean

The Quebec center uses the TelDig system that allows the CSR to use two monitors. The screen on the left shows the faxed-in ticket or sketch. The right screen shows the Center's ticket entry screen or map. The sketch gets the ticket number tied to it and is re-faxed, along with the regular ticket, to each utility.

TelDig is installing systems in New Mexico, Alaska, and Utah.

Why are these higher tech systems worth getting excited about? Consider that the primary, and some would argue, the only reason for the excavation notification process is damage prevention. The first paragraphs on the first page of the Common Ground Study contain these statements: "Damages to underground facilities are usually preventable and most frequently occur due to a breakdown in the damage prevention process.... At the heart of damage prevention is improved information accuracy and consistency in communication between excavators and operators of underground facilities." As more call centers break through that "ASCII ceiling"

less wondering whether "no marks" means "no facilities" or "oops - locator marked the wrong place." It ultimately means less damage to facilities and more non-injured excavators at the season end.

Walt Kelly is a damage prevention consultant. He has been a state pipeline safety official, assisted call centers writing specification, sent in 12,000 excavation notices as a damage prevention coordinator for construction companies, conducted training which significantly reduced damages, and serves as expert witness in damage lawsuits. He can be reached at 507/454-5147 or at walt@waltkelly.com




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