



Toolbox Talk

Volume 18: Digging Deeper

Topic: Using reasonable care to ensure integrity of underground utility lines

Underlying Rules: 16-345-4(c)(2): The excavator must exercise reasonable care when working near underground utilities, including use of construction methods appropriate to ensure the integrity of existing facilities.

Scenario: A contractor was excavating to repair a sewer lateral in Windham. The contractor had a CBYD ticket and had successfully exposed the natural gas service line to the property. The line was left unsupported in the trench as the contractor continued to dig deeper to access the sewer lateral. The trench then collapsed causing rocks and soil to come in contact with the natural gas service line severing it. The contractor then bent, tapped and clamped the natural gas line at the damage location. PURA was onsite conducting the damage investigation and spoke with the contractor regarding laws against tampering with utility facilities and proper shoring requirements. The damage was reported to PURA and the contractor received a warning letter for failure to use reasonable care.



Location of trench cave in and severed natural gas service line. Notice the depth of excavation and lack of shoring or a trench box.



Attempted repair work done by contractor. The natural gas line was taped and clamped by the contractor.

What should have been done?

The contractor should have provided proper shoring for the trench and adequate support for the natural gas line in the trench. Having proper shoring and adequate support would have limited the possibility of a trench collapse and the natural gas line being damaged. Once the natural gas line was damaged the contractor should not have attempted to stop the flow of gas and should have contacted 911 prior to contacting the corresponding utility company.

Lessons Learned:

- It is the contractor's responsibility to use construction methods appropriate to ensure the integrity of an existing utility facility.
- It is the contractor's responsibility to notify 911 if a utility damage has resulted in a gas leak, electrical short circuit or other event endangering the public.
- A contractor should NEVER attempt to repair a damaged gas facility. Entering a hole with leaking gas could cause ignition of the gas, leading to serious burns. Leaking gas in a trench also displaces oxygen, leading to possible asphyxiation. Any repair work or attempt to stop the flow of gas on a damaged natural gas line should only be done by the owner and operator of that facility.

Crew Sign-in		Training Conducted by: _____		Date: _____	
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CBYD Toolbox Talks are designed as quick training tools for use by excavator's safety or management personnel to have brief but meaningful discussions about safe excavation practices. These talks are based on real incidents that have occurred in Connecticut or significant incidents elsewhere in the country.