Toolbox Talk

Volume 23: Know Your Descriptors!

Topic: Hand digging to locate gas facilities

Underlying Rule: 16-345-4(c)(5): Hand digging is required when excavating within the tolerance zone (18” on either side) of a marked gas line. In the tolerance zone, mechanized equipment can be used for the removal of concrete or asphalt surfaces ONLY.

Scenario: A contractor was excavating for soil remediation at a former mechanic’s garage. In the area of excavation there were marks for a plastic natural gas service line that went to the building. The contractor utilized an air spade to uncover the natural gas service but uncovered the abandoned steel service to the building and misidentified it as the active plastic service line. After uncovering the abandoned line the contractor continued with mechanized equipment and damaged the active plastic service to the building. This resulted in the release of natural gas. After the damage the contractor ceased excavation activates and contacted 911 and the natural gas company. The fire department evacuated the building next door and the natural gas company secured the damaged gas line. A report was filed to PURA and the contractor received a warning letter for failure to hand dig around a gas facility.

Markout for the damaged facility. “PL” indicates it is a plastic service.





Location of the damaged active plastic service (right) and the abandoned steel service (left).

What should have been done?

The contractor should have checked the markout descriptors to ensure they uncovered the correct facility. Once it was determined that the facility was not the active gas service the contractor should have continued hand digging within the tolerance zone to uncover the active gas service. If there were any questions regarding the utility facility they uncovered the contractor should have called the utility company for further assistance in identifying the active service line.

Lessons Learned:

- Always check marks for facility descriptors.
- If you do not find the active gas service you should continue to hand dig within the tolerance zone in order to find the facility.
- If you are unsure if you uncovered the correct utility facility, cannot find the utility facility, or have any questions regarding the markouts and descriptors; you should contact the corresponding utility company for assistance.

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.

For questions or additional training, contact Sean Morris of PURA at (860) 827-2888.