

Why Your Municipality Should Join Dig Safe

By Ken Ward, NHMA-PLT

Municipalities are required to call Dig Safe before digging anywhere in the State of New Hampshire. There is also a benefit to joining Dig Safe.

Liabilities

Calling Dig Safe before excavating is state law. The law makes the excavator liable for any damage it causes to underground utilities, unless it has obtained a Dig Safe permit for the excavating. Liability for damaging or breaking a utility line can result in a \$500 fine and costs of losses experienced by those receiving the benefits of the utility. For example, a company might have to lay off personnel due to a broken communications or electrical line. Such an outage could be catastrophic to those affected, and those responsible for causing the damage.

Benefits

Recently, I spoke with Mr. Robert Finelle, Executive Director of Dig Safe System, Inc. (A not for profit organization serving NH, MA, ME, VT and RI.) I learned that Dig Safe would like municipalities to join as members. The principal benefit is notification when someone applies for a Dig Safe Permit in the member municipality. Notification would enable municipalities:

1. To protect their water and lines and citizens, and
2. To enforce utility cut permits

Joining Dig Safe

Belonging to the Dig Safe system is probably not as expensive as officials believe. According to Finelle, there are two classifications of membership.

- a) *General Members* are public or municipal utilities and private water companies specified by the NH Public Utilities Commission. They

must have less than 50 miles of trench line and average less than 50 calls per month, per year. The charge for General Membership is \$2.00 per notification from Dig Safe.

- b) *Principal Members* are those that have greater than 50 trench miles of gas lines, electricity, cable television, telephone and other types of underground plant. Such members share costs for the Dig Safe services and receive notices electronically. Membership costs are determined by a formula.

I urge municipalities to determine the number of miles of underground services their municipality maintains. Then call Finelle at Dig Safe (781-721-1191 or 888-344-7233) to determine the cost to become a member.

One Member's Perspective

The Village District of Eastman has been a member of Dig Safe for a year. They have found membership beneficial. The Village District maintains 43 miles of water mains.

"Membership saves the community money," says Business Manager Virginia Buckley. Dig Safe alerts members before contractors will dig and gives the municipality the opportunity to go out and check the job site. This protects the underground utilities and insures that citizens get "uninterrupted service."

When a contractor applies for a permit, Dig Safe calls the Village District. The call identifies the contractor, the date and time of the dig, and the nature of the work being done.

Dig Safe is a preventative measure. "It could cost hundreds of dollars to repair a broken water main and the return on the investment is immediate," says Virginia.