



Public Service Commission Chairman Lane's Column



March 30, 2020

A Free Call Could Save Your Life

With so many West Virginians home, staying safe during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and with the spring weather we are starting to see, I am sure many are contemplating home improvement projects. I wanted to remind everyone that State law requires contractors, businesses and homeowners alike to call 811 before you start to dig. It doesn't matter whether you're planting a tree or building a new home, the law requires you to call to 811 before you start any project that involves digging.

When you dial 811, your information will be passed along to all utility companies that have underground facilities in your area. Within 48 hours, not counting weekends or holidays, those utilities will come out and mark where their lines are so you will know where you can safely dig. All of this is completely free of charge.

What are the consequences of not calling 811 before you start digging? If you were to hit a water main, you and your neighbors could be out of water and sewer service until the damage is repaired. Hit a fiber optic cable and you could lose telephone and internet service. Of course, if the line you strike happens to be an electric or gas line, you could pay the ultimate price. Such an accident can claim your life and possibly the lives of others who happen to be in the vicinity. But that's not all – you could also be held responsible for the cost of repairs to the damaged utility equipment as well as being charged civil penalties.

You may think that you know where your utility lines are, but don't be too sure. Lines that are buried in the ground can move. Utility lines may shift as a result of the cycle of freezing and thawing, drought and flooding, or even ground tremors caused by mining or road construction. A miscalculation on your part could lead to disaster.

Having to call 811 may require you to plan a bit further ahead for your home projects, but it is worth it for the safety measures it provides. And it is the law.

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