



Public Service Commission Chairman Lane's Column



August 3, 2020

Avoid a Fine by Calling 811 Before You Dig

August 11 is National 811 Day, when the calendar itself reminds us that the law requires you to call 811 before you dig. The so-called “Dig Law” has been around for many years, and in 2018 the West Virginia Legislature created the Underground Facilities Damage Prevention Board (DPB) to be its enforcement agent. Because the Public Service Commission regulates most of the utilities the Dig Law protects, one of the 10 DPB members is a representative of the PSC.

The consequences of hitting an underground utility line are many. The worst possible scenario is that a severed gas or electrical line could kill someone. Not quite so tragic, but expensive and inconvenient, is cutting a line and knocking out utility service. The utility company can hold you responsible for the cost of repairs. Add a penalty of up to \$5,000 from the DPB, and that free call to WV811 makes a lot of sense.

If you think it can't happen to you, here is an example. This spring, the DPB had to investigate an accidental line break. The homeowner had built his home and believed he knew where all the lines were, so he did not call 811. While digging to correct a drainage issue, a shovel pierced the home's gas service line and clipped the line to the home's electrical box. An electrical spark ignited the gas. Fortunately, no one was injured and the fire was contained, but it melted the siding off one side of the house.

By the time the DPB representative arrived the homeowner had an insurance claim for fire damage, his drainage problem wasn't fixed, and he still had to call 811 and wait for the lines to be marked and a work ticket to be issued before he could finish the project. One free call could have prevented all of those headaches.

The work of the DPB is crucial to protecting the underground utility infrastructure in our state. Reports of violations have increased significantly since the DPB made it easy to file the information on its website. If you see a potential violation of the Dig Law, you can report it by going to www.wvdpb.com and clicking on “Report Violation.” It might just save someone's life, or at least keep your utilities on.

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