

Louisiana 811



2021 Issue 2

8 1 1 M A G A Z I N E S



This issue is dedicated to
GIS and Mapping



HEY YOU

with the backhoe!

Listen up. Don't even think about digging until you call 811. Then Atmos Energy will put my pals and me in the ground to mark utility lines. That way, you'll dig up only dirt...and maybe a few rocks...and rusty bottle caps...but not a natural gas line.





from the desk of

Brent Saltzman



You can definitely tell around here that we're on the verge of reaching some sense of normalcy again. We had a very successful "Safe Digging Month" campaign in April and we're beginning to attend more and more conferences and events.

Since the last issue of our magazine, we've accelerated our outreach efforts by visiting numerous home and garden centers, equipment rental agencies and nurseries. Fortunately, most businesses see the value of our program and welcome the opportunity for us to provide them with tabletop displays containing informative 811 bi-fold cards. Oftentimes, these businesses are willing to display one of our 811 banners.

April was packed with events and we had some great exposure for our organization. It started off with Governor John Bel Edwards proclaiming "Safe Digging Month" for Louisiana. It was a whirlwind of activity from there promoting safe digging month with billboards, social media contests, television and radio appearances, and culminated with events at Bass Pro Shops in Denham Springs and Bossier City. We took lots of pictures so please check out some of them here in the magazine.

Yes, things are certainly opening up so if you have an event whereby the audience consists of anyone who excavates, we want to hear about it. Our team is ready and willing to promote safe digging practices. And, as always, if you would like a safety presentation for your organization, we're here for you!

In closing, I want to express my sincere thanks for your continued support of this magazine. I hope you find the enclosed articles interesting, educational and maybe even entertaining!

Most sincerely,

Brent Saltzman
Executive Director
Louisiana 811



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2021 Issue 2

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Roger Cox, Publisher

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Louisiana 811

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2021
Louisiana
Convention Schedule
• • •

LAGC Summer Conference

7/7/21 - 7/11/21
Miramar Beach, FL
www.lagc.org

Plumbing Heating Cooling Contractor Annual Convention & Trade Show

8/19/21 - 8/21/21
Kenner, LA
www.laphcc.org

LA Forestry Association

Annual Convention
8/24/21 - 8/26/21
Golden Nugget, Lake Charles, LA
www.laforestry.com

Common Ground Alliance

Excavation Safety Conference & Expo
10/12/21 - 10/15/21
Renaissance Orlando at Sea World
www.cgaconference.com

Operations Report

Incoming Calls:

2020 thru April – 229,499

2021 thru April – 251,132

Outgoing Notifications:

2020 thru April – 1,101,816

2021 thru April – 1,203,836

Call Ratio (In to Out)

2020 thru April – 1: 4.80

2021 thru April – 1: 4.79

On-Line Ticket Entry

2020 thru April – 79.86 %

2021 thru April – 81.27 %

Home Owner Tickets

2020 thru April – 12,986

2021 thru April – 15,953

Welcome New Members Since 1st Quarter

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Crescent Mdstream LLC
Soldier Operating LLC



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The way I See it

Louisiana 811



Cole Vanderlick
Manager - Damage Prevention
Louisiana 811

The hard-working folks in our industry have been pedal to the metal since the beginning of the year. Hopefully, our recent stroke of weather will slow down so your incredible work can continue with fewer headaches and obstacles. Our team appreciates the dedication that each of you gives on a daily basis!

We have been busy helping to protect excavators and underground facilities by spreading the message to call or click 811 before you dig. "April Safe Digging Month" was a fun and successful approach to promoting 811. A weekly scavenger hunt quiz contest was held on our social media sites. Questions were posted and random winners were chosen to win special 811 prize bundles. Our questions directed the participants to our website for the answers so they could familiarize themselves with our online presence while educating on dig laws and other important 811 facts. Hop on the trend and follow our social media accounts, just like 70 others did during the month of April in order to get updates on useful information.

We hope that you've seen or heard some sort of 811 advertising during this quarter. We strive to live in a place where everyone understands the 811 process. Whether you've seen our TV PSA, interstate billboards, social media,

or perhaps our ad while scrolling on your internet browser, we are working hard to be in front of every pair of eyes living in this great state. Louisiana 811 employees conducted thirteen TV and radio interviews across the state in honor of safe digging month. It was also worthy to mention safe digging month while we presented at the Louisiana Conference on Water Supply, Sewerage, and Industrial Wastes, Louisiana Ground Water Association Conference, and Louisiana Engineering Society Conference. If you live in a major city, soon you may see a car wrapped in Louisiana 811 branding as our latest marketing initiative.

We're excited to share a modern method of training and education in the form of an online course, absolutely free! Of course, we still want to meet with you in person and provide presentations whenever possible, however this online course is an alternative and convenient training method. A certificate is granted upon completion. If someone is ever required to take a training course for violating the dig law, this certificate will be approved and accepted by enforcement agencies.

Be on the lookout for an upcoming invitation to a virtual Open House occurring later this year to learn more about 811's system and community! 



LA 811's Brent Saltzman interviewing on Mornings with Brian Haldane to promote April Safe Digging Month.



Grandchild greeting industry worker, Atmos Energy's Kevin Landry, arriving home from work.



LA 811's Cole Vanderlick presenting at Louisiana Conference on Water Supply, Sewerage, and Industrial Wastes in Kenner.



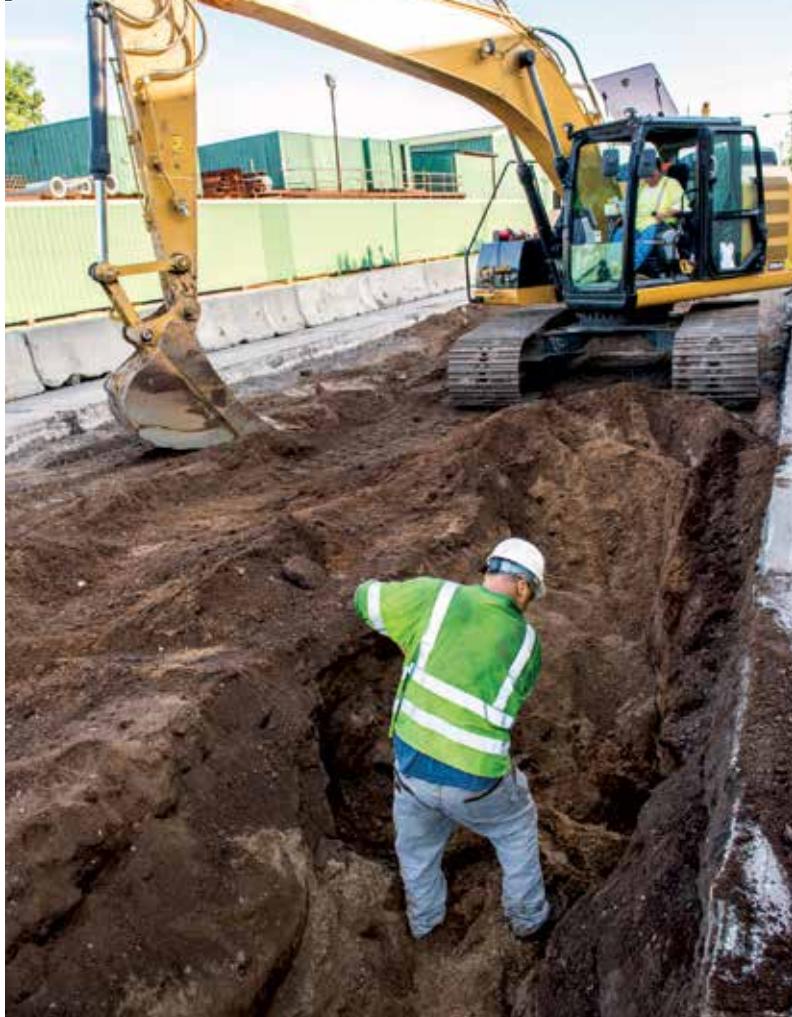
City of Denham Springs Gas Dept at Bass Pro Shop for April Safe Digging Month event



Denham Springs Gas Dept and LA 811 mingling with the public to spread 811 awareness.



LA 811 presenting at Louisiana Engineers Society's annual conference.



Don't make a dig mistake

As an excavator, you have projects to complete and deadlines to meet. But when it comes to working around buried utilities, there's always time to dig safe. One wrong move can lead to a cut utility line and that means costly project delays, fines and the potential for serious injuries.

At CenterPoint Energy, we're committed to being your safe digging partner. That's why we offer no-cost excavation safety training. Our training covers state and federal regulations, identification of underground facilities and excavation safety best practices, all so you can finish your work safely and on time.

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WE POWER LIFESM



LA 811's Cole Vanderlick conducting TV interview next to utility markings in new residential neighborhood



Atmos Energy's Wesley Hawley and Kevin Landry at Bass Pro Shop for April Safe Digging Month event.



Gerald Hoffpauir (left), Water Works District 1 Calcasieu Parish and LA 811 Board Member, with LA 811's Cole Vanderlick at Louisiana Conference on Water Supply, Sewerage, and Industrial Wastes in Kenner.



American Rental Association of Louisiana annual crawfish boil at Lafayette Rental Service.



DEMCO, City of Denham Springs Gas Dept, Atmos Energy, LA 8u at Bass Pro Shop for April Safe Digging Month event.



NOLA Tree Project tree giveaway event in St. Bernard Parish, sponsored by Valero.



April Safe Digging Month scavenger hunt prize bundle contest held on social media.

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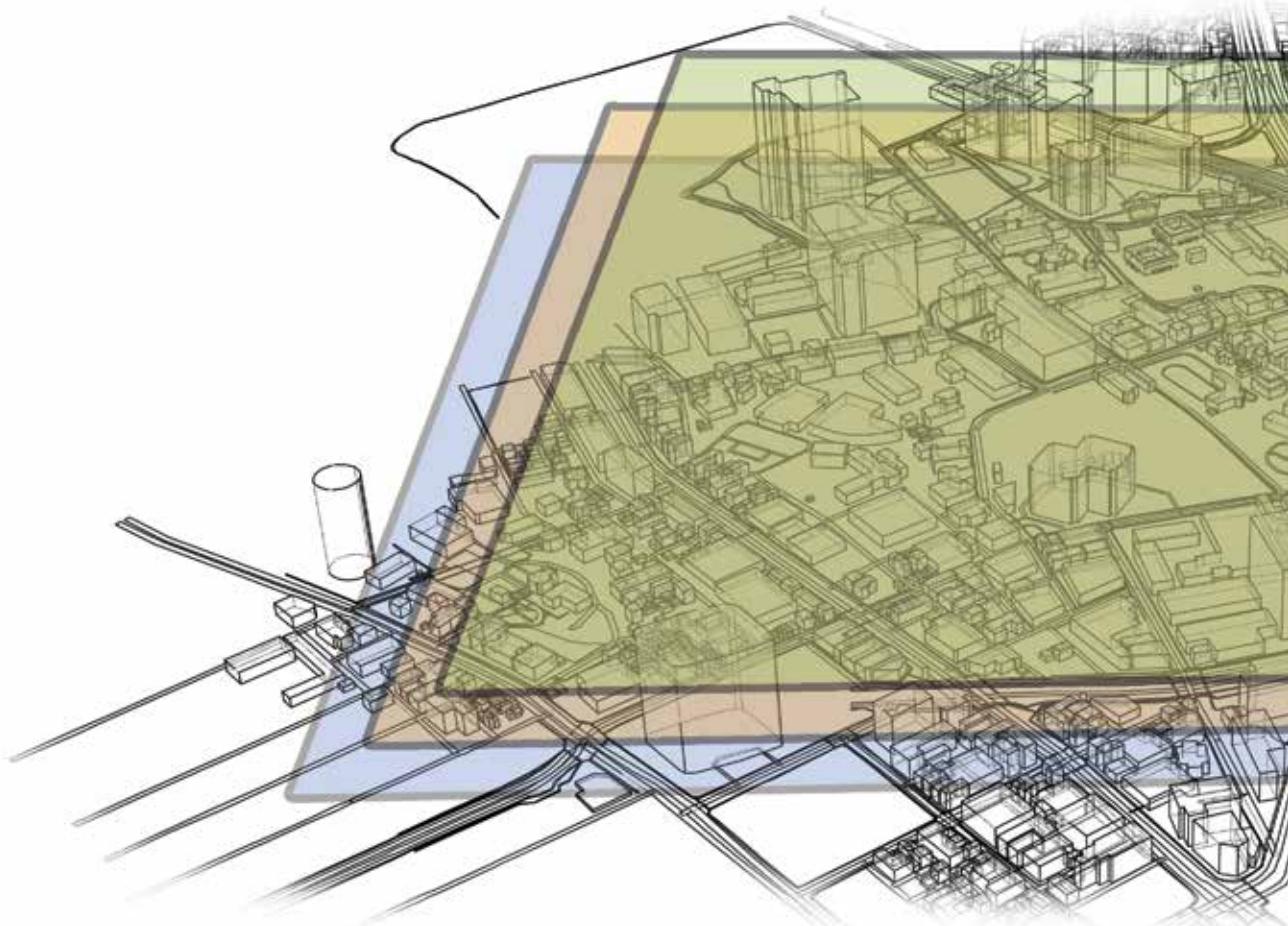
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What's the Difference Bet



And if there is a difference, whose fault is it that many of us in the field don't really know the difference? It can't be JUST our fault. As excavators and locators, what we know about such things are, for the most part, what the sales force and GIS or mapping personnel have told us.

I recently asked Matt Brown, the Operations and Technology Director for Alabama 811, a friend and great resource to tell me in lay terms the difference if there was a difference. He said, "Simply put, a GIS program is designed to give answers to spatial questions as opposed to mapping which is created for display."

Still more explanation was required for me. He continued, 'A GIS program excels in tracking and tracing. An example would be to show me the location of all valves in the system or show me how many times we've repaired the water line between 2nd and 3rd Street in the past ten years.

Mapping on the other hand is what we're accustomed to in the field. Here's the map and it looks like the water line is on the west side of the street, you can see for yourself."

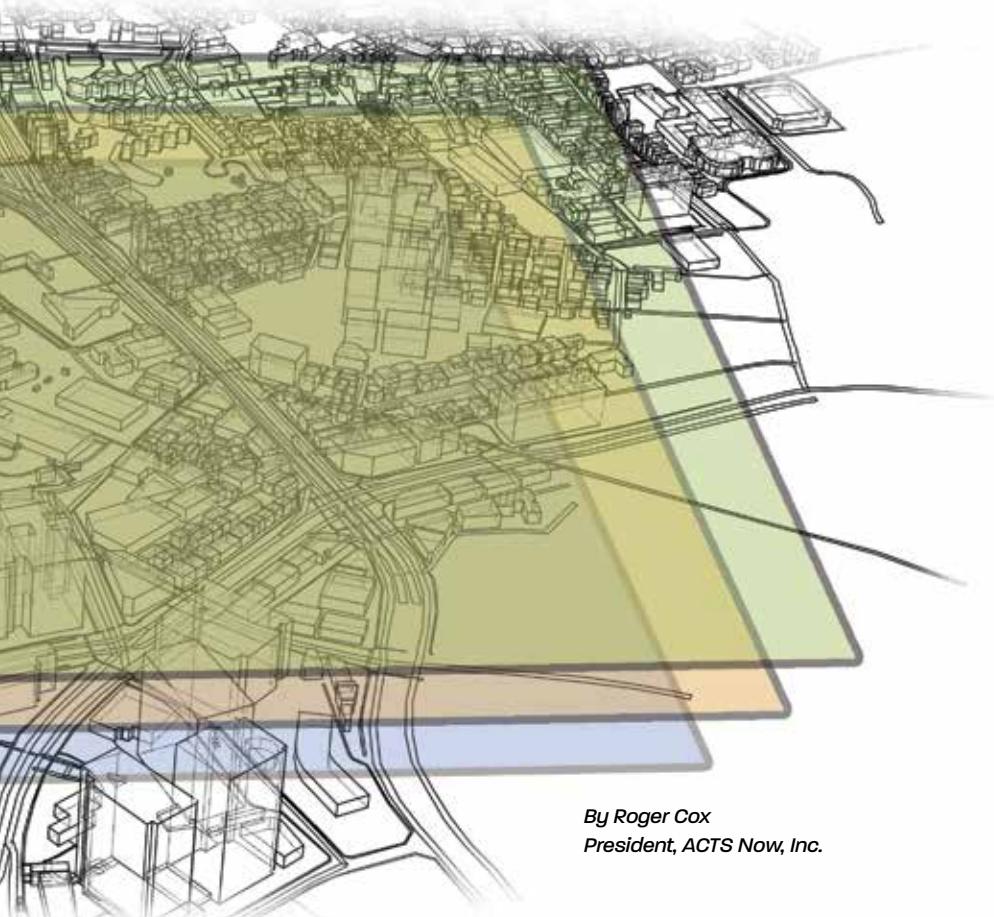
So, it sounds like a GIS system would be of tremendous benefit to any utility manager. Why isn't it more widespread? Naturally, there are likely several reasons. It could be that some operators have invested money in a GIS system, but feel they have not gotten a return on their investment. "Why?", you ask. Some say because the operators haven't taken the time to learn how to use it. There is no doubt but that a GIS system provides a wealth of valuable information to the operators and managers of a utility system. Unfortunately, much of the value has been hidden behind acronyms, technical terminology, and a cloud of disconnect from how things have been done for many years. I don't know how much Albert Einstein knew about GIS and such, but I do know one of the more famous quotes attributed to him

was, "If you can't explain it to a six-year-old, you don't understand it yourself."

Possibly, the cost of providing survey grade coordinates for their system was too expensive and they couldn't see a way to budget for both the survey grade equipment and the GIS Software. Here is some good news and in easy-to-understand terminology. The technology has improved and the price for implementing a full-blown GIS system has drastically reduced. Also, did you know that you can now collect survey grade GPS data with a locating device and upload it to your maps? In the next issue of the 811 Magazine, we're including an article on an amazing pilot program that features a Vivax vLoc3 RTK-Pro locating device. This receiver is a game changer, in that your locator in the field can collect and upload the accurate location of the utility just located.

Finally, it may be that the plan to implement the system was too comprehensive and they just couldn't

Between GIS and Mapping?



*By Roger Cox
President, ACTS Now, Inc.*

fit it into their busy schedules. I know some of you old guys (like me) are saying that maps have worked just fine for a hundred years and “that’s good enough for me to do my job.” I get it. Of course, in 1849 a covered wagon was better than walking from Joplin, Missouri to Sutter’s Mill but if you were to make the same journey today, you wouldn’t expect to see many such wagons on the highways. The truth of the matter is that GIS has been around a long time. Efforts in the late 1970’s and 1980’s were not widely successful, in part because the original use of this technology was expensive. Additionally, long range benefits were projected, but rarely realized, owing to the limitations of the available technology. That is definitely changing. You may remember the excitement of One Call systems in the early days of relational databases, digitized maps and getting away from paper maps into a spatial environment whether members were ready or not.

All of us in this industry know the value of accurate land base and facility maps. Technology is in place to make

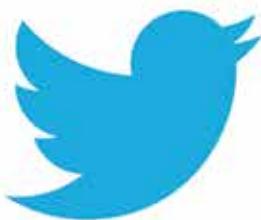
both maps a reality. What we need is a file system to house all the data that we have. In the past we’ve used everything from the memories of the retired folks who knew where most everything underground was, then card files and handwritten notes on maps that were later transferred to an electronic file. The GIS system is a living repository of all things data for your system. Naturally, the GIS system uses maps as the basis for all things going forward but integrates many kinds of data layers using spatial locations to tie back into the system. The system can be customized to your specific needs. An example would be, “when do I need to replace the water line between 2nd and 3rd Street because it has exceeded the threshold for reliability?” You establish the parameters, correctly identify assets, record new installations and repairs (all of which you already do somewhere) and the GIS system can then feed you information necessary to help you manage your operation, remind you of potential risks and help you make better and informed decisions, whether it is an operational or budgetary issue.

I think in the past, one of the selling points I often heard was “move your assets (including maps) into a GIS system and by doing so, you’ll make it easier for the 811 system to send accurate ticket information to you.” That’s important! But frankly that is just a byproduct of why you should be interested in finding the best system for your operation. And the most important reason to move to GIS is that it makes it easier for you to keep up with your assets that you are responsible for everyday and that the data (and maps) will be there after you and I are gone. The next manager and your system will be in your debt. Create a legacy!

After talking to my friend who has the unique ability to make technical things less technical, I’m even more excited about the role GIS will play in our industry in the upcoming years.

Just think about it and see what you can do! 

Keep up with the latest from



Will They Pay the Claim – Or Won’t They??

By Virginia Reames
The Policy Center
Jackson, MS



The purpose of mapping your utility's lines is so you can locate them later on for any number of reasons – repair, replace and so that you can locate them when excavation for any reason is going to take place in or around your vicinity.

Knowing where your lines are is critical – especially given all the construction activity going on: new or expanding utilities, housing developments, road construction, repair of the aging roadways all over the country. Not having accurate mapping will become more and more costly.

State laws are being enacted to aid in preventing damage to this vital infrastructure, the very lifeblood of our growth if you'll forgive the drama. Damaged utility lines are no longer just an inconvenience. It is rapidly becoming more than just unacceptable that an entire 911 system be knocked offline because someone cut the fiber optic – “Oops, sorry” isn't going to work anymore. There's no excuse for it either – we have drones, LIDAR, tracer wire, ground penetrating radar – the technology is *there*.

But we still have people handling it – or *not handling* it like they should. (More the problem!)

Everyone knows “Call Before You Dig” – and 811 then notifies the utilities who go out and mark their lines. That's how it's supposed to work. Any break in this chain and problems arise.

Until recently, if a utility's contractor cut a line, the utility got a bill from the other utility, paid it, and life would go right on. Then someone would turn it in on their insurance, get a check, and all's good.

BUT – because of the new, more sensitive lines, more expensive lines (fiber optic vs pvc??) – more *critical* lines, things are changing.

Each state is enacting various laws requiring that public utilities map their lines, know where their lines are, become a member of 811 – and MARK the lines when they are alerted that construction or excavation will be happening near their lines. Did you read the part where I said “...various LAWS...”?? (That's your key!).

Because of all these new sensitive lines - 5G, fiber optic, etc. when insurance companies get the bills from cutting a utility line, no longer do they pass it through to be paid. NOW they want to know whether 811 was called, and, if so, if the lines had been accurately marked – AND whether or not the utility's maps have been updated regularly. Why?

Because it is NOW the law!

It is the law because too much now depends on these lines-- schools, 911, lives actually depend on these lines – not just an annoying water leak. That's why laws are being passed so that not only are we aware, but aware of our responsibility NOT to damage these lifelines. And because it is now the law, insurance companies double, triple-check on exactly how these lines were cut, who cut them, were they marked and, if so, why were they cut anyway.

If any portion of the state law was not adhered to, there isn't going to be a check! That's right, insurance does not have to pay in the case of violating the dig law.

As the insured, if you are excavating and you didn't call 811 and advise of the

digging activity in the plans, if lines get cut – be aware, you are going to have to fund the repairs yourself, and hope the only problem is a cut line. If someone can't get through on 911 because your guy cut lines that weren't marked because you didn't call 811, yes, you could find yourself in court over it. And likely your insurance isn't going to be there defending you, either – because you failed to comply with the dig law and insurance does not have to pay if a law was violated.

As the insured, you can't fall back on, “I thought my contractor called 811.” – Although the law requires the excavator to call 811, from an insurance liability perspective, it is not his problem. Your contractor subbed it to another guy? YOU are still liable – you hired the contractor(s) – they were doing your job. Contractors and their subcontractors are not the insured – YOU are!

The frequency of claim denials by insurance companies makes it really clear that you HAVE to protect yourself – by complying with the law – being a member of, and calling 811, whenever you have a project requiring any form of digging that could damage lines.

It is *critical* – and to *your* financial benefit – to maintain, and properly update your line maps- every couple of years minimum, if not annually.

That's how to make sure that your insurance company remains your ally in the event of a claim. They are NOT going to pay a claim if you are in violation of any law – and they are increasingly aware of the newer laws happening at the state level mandating membership and current line maps. 

No matter which way the wind blows



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You CAN'T Get There From Here

By Joe Igel

I started in construction in the mid-1970s. One of my first duties was initiating the one call notification for proposed excavations. Prior to that, I had never realized how much was buried underground, but even then, I understood the importance of the notification. Our descriptions were often, especially by today's standards, basic. Our results, while not perfect, were sufficient. I doubt that what we tried to do back then would provide the necessary results today.

At the same time, I was also responsible for payroll entry. Back then, we accumulated payroll data into batches, entered the information into the database, ran cumulative reports, proofed them and then, when, and only when complete, passed the data along to the next phase which was the check calculation and printing and job costing. Paying our employees promptly and providing accurate job costing was the goal, and so providing the data to the next person in a timely and accurate fashion was vital. When that failed to happen or when the other person's processing of the data was interrupted, the goal was jeopardized. Regardless of how well I had accomplished my tasks, the results depended upon someone else.

As I witness the technological and industrial evolution over the past forty

plus years, a lot has changed and yet so much remains the same. There are several "links in the chain", much like in my role in the payroll performance, that contribute to an accurate locate.

First, excavators must effectively communicate the intended area for excavation. Whether it is a clear, concise, and accurate description, or whether it is enhanced by white flags or paint, this step establishes the tempo for the process. It is, in essence, their mapping for the planned excavation. And if providing a more detailed and specific location request speeds the process, it is good for the industry. Sitting on the Ohio Underground Technical Committee, I have witnessed that this has been a problem. It is especially so if the size of the locate request is overwhelming or simply poorly described.

Second, the mapping information in the one call needs to be accurate and the information they receive needs to properly match up with the request. While it has been several years since I have witnessed the mapping effort firsthand, the accuracy of street information and addresses is amazing.

Third, the mapping provided by the utility owners completes the profile. As the excavator's directions are overlaid with the information at the

One Call and, relying on the mapping information provided by the various utility owners, a picture begins to emerge. As we all know, effective screening based upon this comparison, can reduce the need for actual locating and marking. With the huge numbers of tickets called in, locators are stressed to meet their legal obligations.

All of these "links in the chain" need to be strong. If anyone of them fails, the process fails, and the results can be catastrophic. And even with a strong chain, there will still be problems:

- Abandoned lines still in the ground, often in direct conflict with the proposed new installation
- Unidentified lines—many lines are old, were installed and owned by another company and when "purchased", accurate mapping was simply not available
- Lines with no apparent ownership and which no one will claim

But, my minimizing other issues, we are set up for success and can address and ultimately conquer these issues as well. 

Mr. Igel recently retired as vice president of the George J. Igel & Co., Inc. after working there for more than 35 years.

There is No Way This Could Happen, or Not!

Imagine that I arrived in Baton Rouge just before sundown and having never been there before, I stopped at a convenience store. I looked around and saw someone who looked like he knew his way around town, and I asked him, "Hey, could you tell me if there is a 136 Blue Bayou Street somewhere in the city?" "Could be, but I've never heard of it," might be the reply as he turned to walk away. He stopped and said, "They sell street maps inside the store. One sure way to find this place would be to go in there and buy a map or at least ask them if they'll let you look at one."

"Nah, that's alright," I said, "I'll just drive around town and see if I can find it." I don't know the odds of me finding the address (even if there is one) but I'm guessing it is about the same odds of

getting struck twice by lightning in the same storm.

Now that sounds like a ridiculous story, don't it? Do you think that kind of logic would even exist? I don't know but it seems like I experience it regularly.

Arriving at the location and having never dug there before, the backhoe was unloaded from the trailer, he looked around and ask one of the guys, "You ever been here before? Do you suppose there are any buried utility lines here?" "There probably is because there are so much buried lines in right-of-ways anymore, but I really don't know and if I knew, I wouldn't have a clue where they're located," he'd say. He could then stop and say, "One sure way to know if there are any underground utility lines is to call 811. It's a free call and at least we'd know the deal." "No, that's

alright," he said. "I'll just start digging to see what I can find and trust me, I'll be careful."

One of the many roles in the damage prevention world I've been privileged to accept is working with the Mississippi Underground Facilities Enforcement Board. Hundreds of violations have been reported during the past three years and almost 20% of the violations are the result of an invalid or no locate request. I heard many reasons why this happens, but whether it is the result of supposed time management, didn't know better or just bad habits; damages to underground utility lines are often the result of such logic. I find similar results in other surrounding states. For whatever reason just knowing we ought to call is not the same as



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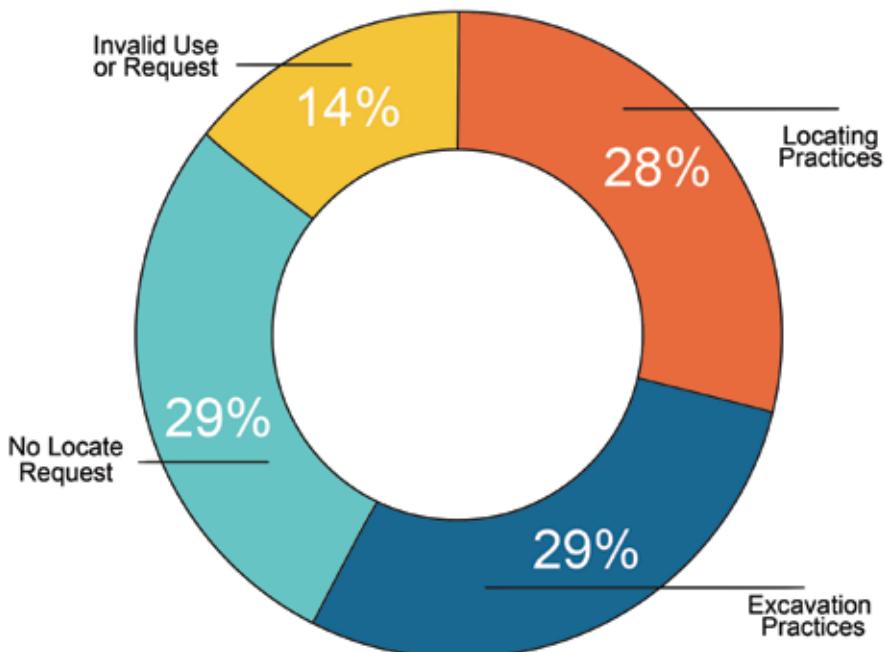


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Reported Damages by Root Cause



actually calling. I know this is the case because statistics show that more and more people know about 811, but still damages occur as the result of not having the locate request.

The truth is the latest DIRT national statistics show that 29% of damages reported were caused by no locate request. We've got to believe that most of those damages are unnecessary in light of another national statistic that tells us damages occur less than 1% of the time when that call to 811 is made. Now to be sure, we don't know what goes through the mind of those who continue to dig without a locate request, but when you step back and take an objective look at the issue, it leaves us shaking our heads.

What would happen if before we dug, we simply contacted 811, waited the appropriate time, respected the marks and dug carefully?

I don't know if that's possible; I only know it is necessary! 



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There is an i in Team

By Larry Cole, Ph.D.
TeamMax

TEAM

Is your company looking in the right spot to increase profit? I'm going to show you the right spot. The content I'm going to discuss is the reality of the business world and should be addressed if you are serious about increasing your net profit.

Do you spend more of your training budget to improve technical or interpersonal performance? I know the answer to that question as thousands of employees over the years agree the answer is technical. It has been estimated that up to 90% of training dollars are spent to improve technical performance. Here's a sad story. While you are training to improve technical performance, people issues in your company decrease your operational efficiency by as much as 25%. Yes decreases ! And, I've had companies tell me they believe their loss is closer to a whopping 50%. Think about the asymmetry – interpersonal issues are burning through your money every hour of the day, yet training on interpersonal performance may get 10% of your training budget. Consider one more fact – your people represent your most underdeveloped resource as people only use about 10% of their potential! You are going to see what

employees' interpersonal behaviors maybe costing your company and I doubt that you will like the numbers.

Let's begin our show and tell by examining the following illustration.



Whenever I ask employees, "how does your company make money?" Every person in class tells me about selling a service or product.

Then I ask the following questions:

1. "How does that happen?" "Is teamwork required in your company to sell a service or product?" You know the answer to that question.

2. Those questions are followed up by, "who is responsible for exhibiting teamwork at your company?" And through their agitation with me announce employees.

3. "H'mm" I say. Then ask, "is there an 'i' in teamwork?" After I'm told "no", I show them this.

TEAM

there it is...

And, everyone agrees that each employee makes the decision as to whether s/he will make a positive impact on teamwork or a negative one. So the string of your company's net profit actually starts with each individual employee deciding to be an effective team member.

Keep reading and you will see the financial loss that is occurring every day in your company. Many researchers have documented that people issues contribute to a loss of 20-25% efficiency

in any organization. Translated that means you are perhaps losing 25% of profitability every hour. Calculate the cost of operating your company per hour. I've worked with many companies that told me their operating cost per hour is \$3,000 or more. Let's use \$3,000. With a 25% loss of efficiency that translates into \$750 per hour.

Now here comes the belly punch. I've worked with a financial guru who uses a formula that divides the cost by the net profit to identify the dollars that must occur the next hour to make up the previous hour's lost revenue. Thus, $\$750 \div 4\% \text{ (assuming your average net profit)} = \$18,750$. You must sell something or improve delivery to create an additional \$18,750 the next hour to make up for the previous hour's loss. And, if you don't, the numbers become sickening when you consider the potential dollars lost in a day, week, month or year.

Let me explain the challenge. Yes, companies place additional pressure on improving processes, profit margins etc. to increase profitability. And, rightly so, but at the same time, companies continue allowing money to walk out

the door because of people issues. There are many factors contributing to this dollar loss. First the people issues have become a habitual way of doing business so people become blinded by their own comfort zone. I can't tell you the number of times I've heard about the normal conflicts between departments. When I ask what is being done about that? The typical answer is nothing because it is normal. It may be normal for your company, but you are allowing it to be -- that's another story.

Second is the willingness to accept the bitter truth that your company is actually losing 25% of your efficiency attributed to people issues. Okay, maybe it's 15% so let's play the numbers game: $\$3,000 \times 15\% = \450 ; $\$450 \div 4\% = \$11,250$. This loss is certainly better than the \$18,750 loss but....do you like the numbers?

Whenever any of us is confronted with information we always have three options. One is to deny it. Believe me I've been told many times that isn't true in our company. And, some of you may believe your company fits into this category. Two are those who may seem to agree with the information but

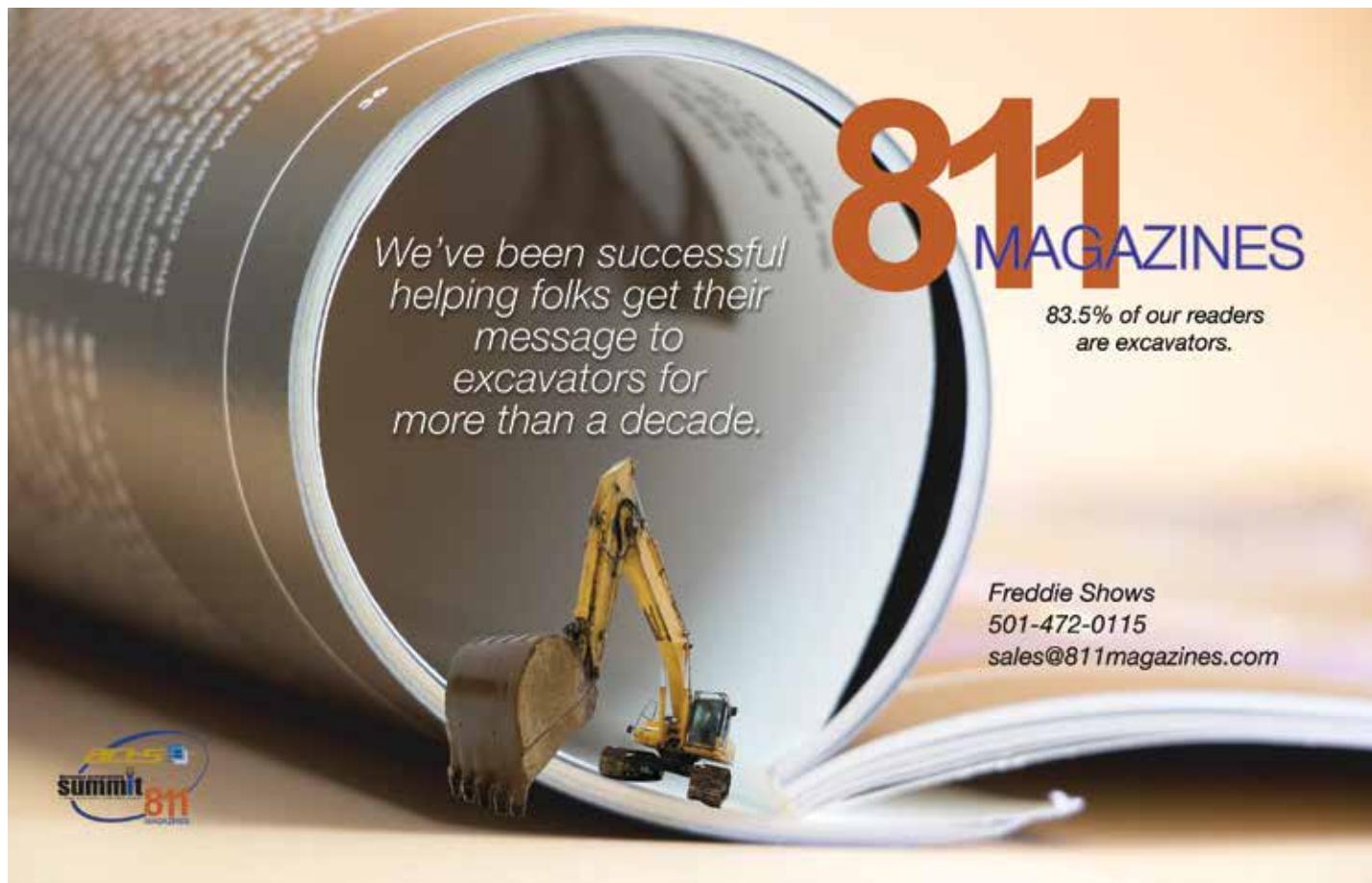
haven't or are not willing to make the decision that remaining as is, is not an option. Of course, I've heard that many times as well.

Three are those leaders who will agree with the facts and make the decision, remaining as is, is not an option and decide to do something about it. Doing so takes a concerted effort to identify and resolve the people issues. I'm sure many reading this article may have done so.

Obviously, I want you to do everything that you can to improve the efficiency of your technical processes to increase your profitability. As you know doing so is a win for everyone who is depending upon the financial success of your company.

The overriding objective of this article is to help open your eyes that a major opportunity to increase your profitability may be looking you right in the eyes! 

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by John Jacobi

GIS, Mapping and Safety

According to gis-mapping.com, “In the simplest terms, GIS is a framework that gathers, manages, and analyzes data. It’s rooted in geographic science to help analyze and organize layers of information into visualizations using either 3D scenes or maps. Therefore, Geographic Information System [GIS] mapping can be defined as the process of entering data layers into GIS software to create maps or 3D scenes.”

What does this have to do with safety? Just this: If you know where there is something that might hurt you or someone else, there is a pretty good chance that you might do something to either entirely avoid that something or take steps to mitigate the risk associated with being unable to avoid whatever it is.

Some dangerous things are obvious – especially to anyone reading this. Busy highways, railroad tracks, fast moving rivers, downed power lines, the wrong side of town after dark. You get the idea.

Using GIS to collect, archive and access data enables people that build, operate, and maintain infrastructure to do their jobs as safely as possible. GIS is especially useful for keeping track of things like buried pipelines, buried electrical cable, and buried communications cable.

The largest GIS I am personally familiar with is the US DOT’s National Pipeline Mapping System (NPMS – <https://www.npms.phmsa.dot.gov>). The NPMS contains information regarding

nearly 1,500 companies that operate 2.8 million miles of transmission pipelines, 162 liquefied natural gas plants, 403 underground gas storage fields, 8,273 hazardous liquid breakout tanks (May 2020 data). The NPMS is more than just a map – it contains spatial and attribute history on each pipeline segment; accident and incidents associated with pipe segments; High Consequence Area (HCA) GIS data; and Unusually Sensitive Area (USA) GIS data. This information is used for many purposes: Inspection planning and analysis; Accident and incident investigations; Emergency response; Risk analysis and resource allocation; Policy analysis and engineering research; and Public Awareness, outreach and support for emergency responders and pipeline safety initiatives at all levels of government.

It is important to note, however, that the NPMS does NOT include gas gathering or gas distribution pipelines OR planned pipelines (if it is not yet in the ground, it is NOT in the NPMS). Many states have publicly accessible databases that do include gas distribution lines.

It is also important to note that the accuracy in the NPMS may be as poor as plus or minus 500 feet and the geo spatial database is typically updated only once a year as part of the annual reporting process.

What is missing? All other underground utilities – electrical, water, sewer, communications, etc.

The real bottom line is that the NPMS is used primarily by PHMSA to manage

its responsibilities under the pipeline safety regulations (49 CFR Parts 190 – 199). There is public access to the NPMS so maps are available to the public and the public can identify pipeline operators and gain access to certain other limited types of information.

That said, the NPMS is only a “hunting license.” The information in the NPMS (and the state databases) is only as good as the data that is entered. There are legacy pipelines that were installed and abandoned prior to the regulations. There are pipelines that were never subject to regulations that may still be in use or that may have been abandoned in place.

GIS is great to try to “connect the dots” to manage and evaluate risk but, when it comes time to start digging for whatever reason, there is no substitute for calling 811 and getting a physical locate. Even with a physical locate, it is IMPORTANT to make sure that the line of concern is the line that was located. I don’t have the statistics but there have been situations where an abandoned line was misidentified as the active line of concern and people were injured and property damaged when the active line was compromised. Don’t let that happen to you.

You cannot be too safe when dealing with buried utilities. 

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