

Call Before You Dig

About 8 minutes to deliver

811, the response window, and what the standard requires when the locate does not tell you enough — which is most of the time.

Hitting a gas line is a fire and an explosion. Hitting a fiber trunk is a bill with six figures on it. Hitting an electrical duct bank is an electrocution. All three are prevented by the same phone call.

WHAT THE RULE SAYS

1926.651(b) is more specific than most people realise:

- The estimated location of utility installations — sewer, telephone, fuel, electric, water, and anything else reasonably expected — shall be determined before opening an excavation.
- Utility companies or owners shall be contacted within established local response times and asked to establish the location.
- If they cannot respond within 24 hours (or a longer period set by state law) or cannot establish the exact location, you may proceed with caution, using detection equipment or other acceptable means to locate them.
- When the excavation approaches the estimated location, the exact location shall be determined by safe and acceptable means — that means hand digging or vacuum excavation, not the bucket.
- While the excavation is open, underground installations shall be protected, supported or removed as necessary.

IN PRACTICE

- Call 811 before every dig. Every dig, every time, including the small one, including the one on the same site as last week. Locates expire.
- Wait the full response period. A ticket is not a locate.
- Mark-outs are estimates, not surveys. The paint tells you roughly where, not exactly, and not how deep.
- Respect the tolerance zone — a set distance either side of the mark where machine digging stops and hand digging or vacuum starts. Check the number for your state.
- Pothole to confirm before committing the machine.
- Private lines are usually not on the ticket. Site lighting, irrigation, propane, private electrical between buildings, and the line the previous owner put in. Those are the owner's to locate, and nobody ever remembers them.

IF YOU HIT SOMETHING

Stop. Get everyone out and upwind. Do not try to pinch, patch or cap a gas line — evacuate, keep ignition sources away, and call 911 and the utility. Report every strike, including the one that only scratched the coating: a nicked coating is a leak in five years.

ASK THE CREW

- Is there a current locate for what we are digging today, and who called it?
- Where is the tolerance zone, and who is hand digging it?
- Are there private lines here that would not be on a ticket?

29 CFR 1926.651

This is a toolbox talk, not a course. It is general awareness on one topic — not site-specific, not a hazard assessment, and not a substitute for assessment of your workplace by a competent person, your written programs, or manufacturers' instructions. It does not by itself satisfy any OSHA training requirement. Regulations change; verify against the current standard. Whoever delivers it is responsible for deciding it is suitable and sufficient for the work. Where a talk covers first aid, resuscitation, or mental health it is general safety information, not medical advice, not a substitute for professional medical care or certified emergency-response training, and it confers no certification — in an emergency, call 911. Free to print and use, as is, with no warranty of any kind. Migna Safety Solutions · training.mignasafetysolutions.com

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

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About 8 minutes to deliver · 29 CFR 1926.651

Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

#	Print name	Signature	Date
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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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