

## To Locate Or Not To Locate

The recent hit on the oil pipeline in Burnaby brings back into focus the issues that the excavating community has been having around locating and marking underground gas facilities in British Columbia. Public, worker and environmental safety are clearly on the line when such a hit occurs. Alleviating the potential for such a hit should be the common goal of excavators, regulators and utility owners alike. In British Columbia this has proven to be a challenge.

Just to review, several years ago a major gas utility owner made the executive decision to stop sending out locators to mark and locate gas distribution lines on the mainland. Despite a hue and cry from the excavating contractors, the regional associations and BCCA, this practice has continued and, in fact, has now spread to Vancouver Island. There is no doubt that the gas company is acting within its rights under current gas regulations. However, while it may be legal, we do not believe that it is a safe practice.

In a perfect world, excavators would take all precautions necessary to ensure a safe excavation, including hand digging to expose underground facilities. In fact the regulations in BC require excavators to do just that. They need to call the facility owner either through BC One-Call (if the facility owner belongs) or direct to advise that they are going to be digging and obtain the necessary information and assistance to locate those lines. In jurisdictions across North America the next step for a gas line would involve the gas utility owner sending out a professional locator to the excavation

to mark and locate the gas line in question. In BC, however, the gas company only has to provide information to the individual seeking to dig in the ground and then, well, it is up to that individual to do the rest. Keeping in mind that the "individual" may be a sophisticated excavating company or it could be a small excavator, a farmer, or even a homeowner wanting to do some digging in their backyard, it is hard to argue that this is a safe approach to locating lines.

For small operators and homeowners interpreting maps and drawings and safely locating the lines may be a challenge. Unfortunately there is no easy place to turn for help. There are no professional standards or training programs for doing locate work in British Columbia and there are very few companies offering locating services. That may change over time, but for now it is certainly an issue. Sophisticated excavators, on the other hand, are likely to have sophisticated equipment and trained workers to assist in locating underground facilities. Given accurate information it is likely that the lines will be located efficiently and safely.

What about the accuracy of the information being handed out? Can it be relied on? Not always. In fact, we are told on a regular basis by our excavator contractors that there are serious concerns with the accuracy of the information they are given by gas facility owners. Lines show up where none are indicated or else they may be in completely different locations than expected. Maps may be poorly crafted and barely legible in some instances. The obli-

### Inside this Issue:

- To Locate or Not to Locate
- We Know You Hate Surveys

WE'RE ON  
THE WEB!  
[www.bccassn.com](http://www.bccassn.com)



### ONLINE DOCUMENT SERVICES

Call your local Construction Association today and find Out what you're missing!

gation to provide accurate information ought to rest squarely on the shoulders of the utility owner, and, if they are not able to live up to that obligation, then they should take on the liability of doing the locating themselves.

The gas company in question often points to the fact that most gas line hits are caused by individuals who don't call before they dig and they say that education for excavators is the way to go to improve safety. It is true that many hits are caused by individuals who decide to go to town and rent a backhoe and never even consider calling BC One Call for locate information and no one would argue against the continued need for more education on the subject. However, it is hard to see how that will help those responsible excavators and individuals who do call and are met with inaccurate information and a lack of assistance with physical locates. It also begs the question: If the gas company is so concerned about the ability and

education level of the excavators unearthing their lines, why do they feel that safety concerns have been addressed by just faxing out some drawings when they know someone is about to dig?

The construction industry needs to work hard on educating workers and ensuring that regulations and safe practices are followed when doing any sort of excavation. At the same time, however, the gas companies need to step up to the plate and provide accurate locate information and professional locators to ensure a safe excavation. If, on their own, they can't see the wisdom of such safe practices then the government needs to step in and change the current regulations to make sure they do! The government and the gas companies need to be proactive on this safety issue and not wait until the next disaster hits.

## We Know You Hate Surveys – But Please Do This One

Over the last few weeks you have probably been advised by your regional association that BCCA is doing a survey and many of you have done the normal thing and blanked this out of your consciousness. We know you are busy, but we would very much appreciate it if you would take a couple of minutes out of your day and complete it. Or, in the alternative, when a very nice girl named Rebecca calls you, could you please take the time to answer her questions?

The BCCA Membership Survey concerning the level of apprenticeship within the construction industry has gotten underway and thank you to all those members who have already contributed their responses. Answers to the survey began coming in mid July and to date, nearly 200 members have responded. Of those companies that have responded, 82% are currently training employees and 85% would be interested in indenturing more apprentices

in the future. When asked to comment on the major barriers to taking on apprentices, difficulty finding quality people, the lack of journeymen to train them, and the time required for the training were the most common responses. Over 80% of the members surveyed noted that they are currently experiencing difficulty finding skilled trades people and 52% of companies would be interested in recruiting overseas to deal with this shortage of skilled workers.

This is very valuable information for our organization and the industry as a whole. Please share your perspectives on apprenticeship within your company and go to [www.bccassn.com/surveyhr.html](http://www.bccassn.com/surveyhr.html) to complete the survey online or to print it and return by fax. Or—be prepared to speak with Rebecca!

Thank you in advance!



### BC CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION

210-174 Wilson St., Victoria, BC V9A 7N6

Phone: 250-475-1077

Fax: 250-475-1078

Email: [bcca@bccassn.com](mailto:bcca@bccassn.com)

The mission of the BCCA is to provide leadership and excellence in the representation of and service to British Columbia's construction industry