

LOCATING UNDERGROUND UTILITIES

By Wayne Nelson, Operations Manager

We have recently had inquiries from some of our customers about the procedures that are in place when any excavating will be done on or near their property.

The first step is to call J.U.L.I.E., Inc. This stands for Joint Underground Locating Information for Excavators. When anyone calls J.U.L.I.E. they must give them the address or location of the planned excavation as well as some other basic information. The J.U.L.I.E. operator will then issue you a Dig number that should be recorded as well as a list of utilities that will be notified. These utilities will have 48 hours (two business days) for non-emergency digging or 2 hours for any emergency excavations to check the area and mark their utilities if any are present.

I do want to clarify some misconceptions and “urban legends” about J.U.L.I.E. When you call either 1-800-892-0123 or the shorter 811 you will not speak to anyone named Julie. No one from J.U.L.I.E. will come out and mark the underground utilities. J.U.L.I.E. is really what it says it is: One-stop calling for the locating of underground utilities. After getting the needed information from the caller they then call all utilities that service that location.

If utilities are present you will see painted markings and/or flags showing the location of the utilities. There is a color code to let excavators know what type of utility is there. The color code is as follows:

Red-Electric
Yellow-Gas, Oil, or Petroleum
Orange-Communications (cable TV, phone, etc.)
Blue-Potable Water
Green-Sewer
White-used to mark outline of the area to be checked for excavation

All utilities should respond to mark the areas within the specific time frame. If a utility is not present the utility company often will spray paint a circle with a line through it if they have nothing there.

Now, here is where the questions we get come in. Utility companies are bound by regulations that they can only mark the underground utilities that they have installed and own.

Examples:

Ameren Electric- will mark underground electric or gas lines to the respective electric or gas meters, most likely located on or near the structure it serves. American Electric installed and owns all of these lines.

However, if you have an underground electric line serving an outbuilding that was installed past the electric meter the company will not locate this line.

Comcast Cable-will locate its underground cable to the structure. Comcast installs and owns all of these lines.

City of Springfield Sewer Department-will mark main sewer lines in the street. Will not locate sewer lines than connect at the main sewer line and goes to a structure. This is because the property owner is responsible for the entire sewer line from the main sewer to the house. The City of Springfield did not install nor do they own property owner's sewer line.

Curran-Gardner Townships Public Water District-will mark all water mains in the requested location area. It will also mark the service line from the water main to the property line. This is usually where the water meter pit is located. The water district installed the water service line from the water main to the property line (meter pit) and owns this portion of the line.

The water service line past the property line was not installed by the water district and the district does not own this line.

The water district is restricted from locating any water line past this point since this line was installed by the property owner or his designated plumber and is the property of the property owner.

No public water supply can or should locate any portion of a water service lines owned by the property owner for the following reasons:

- public water supplies do not have legal access to private property.
- water district personnel did not install the line and don't know where it was installed.
- if we use our pipe locating equipment on the service line from the water main to the property line and we are wrong on our locations marks we are responsible for repairing it at our cost if the excavating utility damages it while digging.
- if we would use our pipe locating equipment on the service line from the property line to the structure (privately owned) we would automatically have taken responsibility and liability if any damage occurs.

In addition to the above reasons, if we did locate a private water line and it got hit we go could go from trying to be a good neighbor to being the defendant in a liability suit very quickly. All of the above reasons is why we cannot and do not locate privately-owned water service lines.

I have listed two utility locating companies that serve the Springfield area. Our water district does not assume any responsibility for the accuracy or reputations of these companies. You may also perform your own Google search for a locating company.

- A. Ervin Cable: 217-679-3672
- B. GPPS: 217-299-5078

If you have any questions please feel free to call me at 217-820-1561 from 7:00 am to 3:30 pm Monday through Friday.