

Underground utilities: verify before digging

Talk 15 of 52 | Week 15 | Electrical

Leader: adapt this talk to today's electrical work and site procedures. See the educational-use and liability notice on page 2.

START THE CONVERSATION

A crew is ready to trench for a new feeder. An old drawing shows a clear route, but buried installations must be located through the required process before excavation proceeds.

KEY TALKING POINTS

1. Determine the estimated location of utilities before opening an excavation, contact the appropriate utility owners, and follow the applicable locating process. As work approaches a utility, its exact location must be established by safe, acceptable means under the responsible excavation plan.
2. Do not treat a drawing, paint mark, or previous excavation as proof that the whole route is clear. Ask the supervisor how current information, private installations, and changes in the work area have been addressed. Unresolved information should be reported before digging.
3. Electrical job example: a new duct bank crosses a service yard containing lighting circuits and communications. Review the route with the excavation team and the facility contact. Make sure everyone understands the limits of the located area and the approved method near existing installations.
4. Keep the work boundary visible and communicate it to replacement operators and delivery crews. If the route shifts to avoid an obstruction, stop for review; the changed area may not have been included in the original locating and excavation arrangements.
5. Discuss the response to an unexpected pipe, cable, warning tape, or structure. Stop the affected operation and notify the responsible person. Do not pull, cut, move, or test an unknown installation simply to decide whether it is still in service.
6. Plan how excavated utilities will be protected and supported as required. The conduit crew should coordinate its activities with the excavation supervisor rather than independently moving exposed services to make space for the new installation.
7. Close with a tabletop incident scenario. Who raises the alarm, keeps workers away, and contacts the utility or emergency responders? Do not attempt an improvised repair after a strike. A small-looking damaged service may present a much larger electrical or other hazard.

ASK THE CREW

1. What confirms that today's route is within the located area?
2. What do we do if an unknown installation appears?

BEFORE WORK STARTS

Confirm the current locate information, excavation boundaries, and supervisor contact before digging starts.

OSHA SOURCES / FURTHER READING

OSHA 1926.651: Excavation and underground installations

Attendance & action record

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Date: _____ Leader: _____

Company / jobsite: _____

Site hazards and controls discussed:

Follow-up action / responsible person / due date:

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Participant name	Signature / acknowledgment

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