

Attention Excavators: Know What's Below, Call Before You Dig

By Jenna Jones

New Mexico One Call would like to take this opportunity to remind excavators of the importance of calling before you dig to be in compliance with New Mexico state law as well as informing you of the proper procedures involved in requesting a locate. New Mexico Excavation Law places certain responsibilities with the excavator (a person using a mechanical digging device) for preventing damage to underground facilities. The law provides for a one-call system that the excavator can use free of charge to request to have underground facilities located and marked before an excavation occurs.

When you call 811, the one call operators will ask for the necessary information, and they will read back what they have entered on the ticket. *It is the responsibility of the caller to confirm that the information the operator reads back is correct.* The operator will also read the list of member facility owners that will be notified for the request. *It is the caller's responsibility to notify facility owners that are not members of the one call center of their plans to excavate.* For faxed or on-line requests, a confirmation copy of the request will be returned to the requester. *It is the excavator's responsibility to immediately verify the information on the returned confirmation copy is accurate.* If you find any errors, contact the one call center immediately.

If an excavator damages a facility, the excavator must immediately stop excavation and notify, if necessary, the emergency responders (911) and take necessary action to make the damage site secure and safe. The excavator must also immediately notify by telephone the facility owner of the damaged facility. The excavator will receive instruction from the facility owner when normal excavation can resume. The owner of the damaged facility must respond to the site and request an emergency locate. Emergencies are unplanned excavations and have limited requirements under the excavation law. An emergency is defined as an excavation that must be performed due to circumstance beyond the control of the excavator and that affects public safety, health, or welfare.

State Law requires you, the excavator, to:

1. Plan your excavation.
2. Call two working days in advance before you dig.
3. Determine the location of any underground facilities.
4. Call the one call center if any facility is not marked to determine if it is clear.
5. Preserve line location markings.
6. Maintain at least 18 inches of clearance from the horizontal mark and the edge of the mechanical digging device and expose any conflicts.
7. Support underground facilities during the excavation as necessary.

8. Backfill in a careful manner.
9. Notify facility owners of any damage immediately.
10. Call back if the excavation work is going to exceed ten working days. Relocates are limited.

1. Plan your excavation.

New Mexico excavation law requires excavators to plan every dig to minimize interference and prevent damage to underground facility lines in or near the excavation area. You can help facility owners identify where you are going to work by marking the excavation site with white paint, flags, stakes, or whisksers.

The law requires excavators to call the one call center at least two working days before beginning any planned excavation. Two working days excludes holidays and weekends. Line spots are valid for only ten working days. Therefore, you should limit the size of the requested work area to the amount of work you can complete in ten working days.

2. Call two working days in advance before you dig.

Calls to the one call center are free. To contact the one call center, you can:

Call toll free 811;

Fax a request toll free to 1-800-727-8809

or in Albuquerque 260-1248;

Submit a request on-line at <http://form.nmonecall.org>

New Mexico's excavation law requires you to provide certain information to the one call center. This information includes identifying:

- the excavator and a contact person
- the type of work to be done
- who the work is being done for
- the excavation site with details of the location and size
- driving instructions if necessary
- spotting instructions
- any appropriate remarks regarding access or hazards

If you do not supply the necessary information, your request may be delayed or denied until the necessary information is provided. Excavators are encouraged to mark the excavation site in white before requesting a locate.

3. Determine the location of any underground facilities.

The excavator is responsible for determining the location of all facilities in the excavation area before digging. After you call, the one call center will provide a list of member facility owners being notified. If a facility owner is not a member of the one call service, the excavator is responsible to notify that facility owner

directly to mark their facilities. Facility owners will not spot facilities they do not own. Services from the facility owner's meter, transformer, or other facility to the home or business usually belong to the homeowner or business. The excavator must ensure service lines and private lines are marked by the homeowners before digging. Facility owners provide the approximate horizontal location of underground facilities. The facility owner's location marks should be within 12 inches of the edge of the underground facility. Depth of facilities is not provided.

4. Call the one call center if any facility is not marked to determine if it is "clear."

Facility owners have two working days to mark the facilities. If the excavator determines a facility owner has not marked %CLEAR+or %NO FACILITIES+at the job site, then the excavator is required to call the one call center to determine if the facility owner has called in a %CLEAR+for the request. The excavator is not permitted to dig until all the facilities have been marked or cleared. If an excavator is delayed or incurs costs because a facility owner failed to mark or clear the facilities at the job site within the two working day period, the excavator can recover those costs from the facility owner under the law. The facility owner may also be subject to additional fines and penalties.

5. Preserve line location markings.

The excavator is required by law not to move or obliterate markings made by the facility owners or to fabricate markings in an unmarked location for the purpose of concealing a violation or noncompliance with the excavation law. Facility owners and excavators are encouraged to keep and maintain their own records to show their compliance with marking and preserving marks in the field.

Excavators may find it useful to request chalk, paint, flags, stakes, or whisks for marking a site to withstand the construction activity occurring at the site. The use of offset marks is required to reconstruct actual locate marks if the original marks are to be obliterated. The excavator is generally responsible for cleaning the excavation site of any locate marks after construction.

6. Maintain at least 18 inches of clearance from the horizontal mark and the edge of the mechanical digging device and expose any conflicts.

Where conflicts with the planned excavation and the facility owner's lines exist, the excavator is encouraged to expose the facility line using non-invasive techniques such as vacuum or hydro-extraction or by hand digging to ensure the mechanical excavating device does not violate the 18 inch restricted zone around the underground facility. This is especially important where the excavator uses directional boring or tunneling techniques.

The excavator is required by law to maintain a clearance of 18 inches from the mark of the underground facility line as marked horizontally on the surface of the ground.

7. Support underground facilities during the excavation as necessary.

The excavator is required to provide support for the existing facilities in or near the excavation area necessary to prevent damage to them. In some cases, the excavators may enlist the help of the facility owner, who has the expertise and equipment to work near or on hazardous facilities to ensure the safety of the excavator's workers.

8. Backfill in a careful manner.

The excavator is required by law to backfill all excavations in a manner and with materials as may be necessary to prevent damage to and provide reliable support during and following backfilling activities for pre-existing facilities in or near the dig site.

9. Notify facility owners of any damage immediately.

The excavator is required by law to immediately notify the owner of an underground facility that may have been damaged or dislocated during the excavation work. This includes: nicks, dents, gouges, cuts, scrapes, or scratches to the coatings of pipe, wires, or cables. The excavator should stop digging until the facility owner inspects the damage and determines it is safe to resume work. Damage may not only occur at the point of contact but may also occur at one or both ends of the pipe, wire, or cable by damaging the termination points where the facilities enter buildings or are fed from other facilities.

10. Call back if the excavation work is going to exceed ten working days. Relocates are limited.

Locate marks are valid for ten working days. The excavation law requires the excavator to call in only the amount of work that can reasonably be completed in ten working days and allows relocates only for circumstances that are beyond the excavator's control. If the excavator's job is delayed, the excavator must call the one call center for a relocate. The facility owners have two working days to mark relocates.

For questions, contact New Mexico One Call Toll Free by dialing 811