

Abandoned Lines

Many local and state ordinances, if they exist at all, are vague when it comes to establishing requirements for the future of abandoned utilities.

Technological advances have made underground burial cheaper and quicker than in the past. In addition, too many buried pipelines having reached their life expectancy and need to be replaced. Deregulation of the telecommunications industry and the increasing uses for fiber-optic cable have all increased the demand for underground space. Since strong legislative requirements for abandoned utilities are lacking, most obsolete underground utilities are typically abandoned in place by the owner, who has no economic incentive to do otherwise.

What are the main problems with abandoned utilities?

- **Usable available underground space is reduced.**
- **Repair of adjacent facilities is hindered and therefore slowed.**
- **Contamination of soil if the line is not properly purged and cleaned upon abandonment.**
- **Confusion when attempting to locate active lines.**
- **Excavation downtime due to unknown status of the exposed line.**

A common thread among many states' practices/policies is that the facility owner should retain ownership of the line, and therefore, responsibility for locating it. Ownership should not cease when you abandon a facility in place. This "retained ownership" also ensures that if the abandoned line would need to be removed to facilitate new construction, the original owner retains the cost of removal or relocation.

Public Works Magazine

Stephanie Johnston, 2015

"APWA's Utility & Public Right-of-Way Committee explained why looking the other way is no longer an option vis-à-vis abandoned utilities. In addition to limiting space for new installations and creating confusion when trying to locate lines, they're dangerous.

Horizontal directional drilling (HDD) enabled public and private utilities to avoid existing utilities by burying new lines under them. Thanks to this quick fix, intersections and rights of way in the nation's most populous areas are webbed with utilities from near the surface to so deep, they're becoming an issue for proposed gravity sewers. There's no more room.

This is a financial, as well as safety and engineering, issue. Utilities that remove abandoned lines from their inventory to avoid being taxed endanger crews out in the field who assume the maps they're working with are correct and take money out of public coffers when it's most needed.

Until recently, public agencies haven't received much support for pushing the issue. That's changing, though. According to the [presentation](#), Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin identify owners and make them pay for removal (or crushing in place) when/if necessary."

Other potential solutions are to charge a leasing fee or working with private utilities to repurpose assets, promoting use of decommissioned pipelines. At least one telecommunication company has run cable through decommissioned pipelines.

Successful Fall Committee Meetings

CenterPoint Energy Hosts Meetings in Houston, Nov. 13-16

11/17/2017

Thank you to CenterPoint Energy and their team for hosting our committees last week. Over 125 members attended our committee meetings at CenterPoint Energy's Houston office.

Meeting Highlights

- Educational Programs & Marketing: Task teams of the Education Committee worked to finalize a toolkit for the fencing audience, recommended the 2018 hot air balloon plan and learned about opportunities surrounding CONexpo from the American Association of Equipment Manufacturers.
- OCSI: The OCSI committee agreed to establish two new task teams. The first task team, 811 Center Benchmarking, will review existing Best Practice 3-23. The second team will look at disaster response procedures at one call centers to potentially identify new best practices or create an online toolkit.
- Best Practices: The committee held breakout sessions for the following teams to facilitate in-person dialogue: Mapping Proposed Facilities, Cross Bore Determination and Mitigation, Abandoned Lines, and Strategic Planning. The committee was unable to reach consensus on proposed wording submitted for *Transaction Record (TR) 2017-01, Modification to Practice 4-5*; therefore, the task team will continue to review and will submit updated wording prior to the next meeting.

CGA Best Practices Related to Abandoned Lines

4.11 Abandoned Facilities

Practice Statement:

Information on abandoned facilities is provided when possible.

Practice Description:

When the presence of an abandoned facility within an excavation site is known, an attempt is made to locate and mark the abandoned facility. When located or exposed, all abandoned facilities are treated as live facilities. Information regarding the presence or location of an abandoned facility may not be available because of updating or deletion of records. In addition, abandonment of an existing facility, damage to an abandoned facility, or limited or non-existing access points may render an abandoned line non-locatable. It should be emphasized that recommendation of this practice is not an endorsement of the maintenance of records for abandoned facilities.

5.27 Backfilling

Practice Statement:

The excavator protects all facilities from damage when backfilling an excavation. Trash, debris, coiled wire, or other material that could damage existing facilities or interfere with the accuracy of future locates are not buried in the excavation.

Practice Description:

Extra caution must be taken to remove large rocks, sharp objects, and large chunks of hard-packed clay or dirt. **No trash or pieces of abandoned lines are backfilled into the trench.** This helps prevent inadvertent damage to the facility during the backfill process.

6.16 Information Capture Practice Statement:

The facility owner/operator collects detailed mapping information.

Practice Description:

The facility owner/operator captures through the electronic database the following information to ensure project safety in the plan, design, construction, documentation, location, and maintenance of their longitudinal utility.

- Any new construction that was entered at the time of installation
- The location of abandoned or sold facilities