

April is National Safe Digging Month: **Top 6 Tips for Safe Excavations**

As the days grow warmer and longer, excavation activity ramps up. That's why every year, Congress declares April as National Safe Digging Month. Did you know that there are more than 500 dig-ins to buried utilities and pipelines **every day** in the U.S.?^{*} That's more than **500 daily opportunities for serious injuries to workers** and communities.

Thankfully, following a few key steps – including notifying 811 for every dig, every time – can help make projects involving even the most complex excavations go smoothly and safely.

With spring's arrival, here are six important tips for every excavation – during National Safe Digging Month and beyond:

- 1. Make sure you have a valid 811 ticket.** Professionals should always contact 811 a few working days prior to a planned dig – every dig, every time – but you also need to make sure your 811 ticket is valid. Ensure that your ticket documents the correct location, start/end date, contracting organization and work type.
- 2. Confirm that all utilities have responded.** Prior to breaking any ground, check your 811 ticket to confirm that all utilities have responded to your request by either marking your jobsite or clearing your ticket. Be sure to also check the site for evidence of underground facilities that have not been marked before proceeding.
- 3. Preserve the utility markings.** The ball's in your court for preserving stakes, flags or paint that indicate the approximate location of underground utilities. If weather or other factors render these important marks no longer visible, request a remark through the 811 center and wait for new ones before proceeding.
- 4. Pothole or test dig to visually ID underground utilities.** Abandoned lines and the difficulty of locating utilities in congested subterranean environments can lead to mismarked utilities. Use hand tools or other soft-dig methods within the utility tolerance zone to expose and confirm the location of buried utilities – it's the only surefire way to know where each facility is underground.
- 5. Be mindful of heavy equipment near buried lines.** Even after potholing to expose buried utilities, keep a close eye on heavy equipment when working near buried lines and pipelines. When dig-ins to buried utilities do occur, backhoes are the equipment most likely to cause the damage.*
- 6. Follow the three S's of trench safety.** Dirt is heavy, making proper trench safety procedures a must during excavation. Follow [OSHA's slope, shore and shield recommendations](#) to keep workers safe during digging projects: *Slope* or bench trench walls, *shore* trench walls with supports or *shield* trench walls with trench boxes.

For more information on safe excavations, visit www.CommonGroundAlliance.com.

^{*}SOURCE: Common Ground Alliance's 2022 DIRT Report.