

# ILL-DEFINED LOCATE REQUESTS Continue to Frustrate Utilities (and others!)

Over the years working at KRWA, I have received many complaints from cities and rural water districts about the way contractors submit requests for utility locates to the Kansas Notification Center. Those complaints vary from: “I wish this could be a little more specific” to “I have no idea where this is supposed to be?” Most of the complaints I receive are of this nature: “There is no way on Earth that the contractor is going to dig up the *entire property*?” Many locate requests have been brought to my attention because the caller or online user specified to “mark entire property” of a location. Logically, such a request is impractical and that is particularly so in rural water districts. At any urban address, the likelihood that a contractor is going to dig up the entire property has to be nearly zero percent. Yet, due to laziness – or possibly ignorance of the caller, those types of requests are made daily. On one hand, “ignorance” can be overcome. Ignorance is nothing more than lack of knowledge. So, after becoming familiar with a location and the area where an excavation is to take place, a more appropriate locate request can be called in. On the other hand, it is difficult to excuse “laziness”. If a utility operator calls a contractor and asks the contractor to identify or “white line” the zone of excavation, and the contractor's response is, “I ain't goin' out there to do that! That's outta my way! I'm too busy. Just do your job and mark it!” – then I consider that to be LAZINESS! Surprisingly, that very response from contractors has been heard several times.

However, it would be inaccurate to depict contractors as the only possible guilty party in the above-mentioned drama. Utility operators have also been known to “reject locate requests until white-lined” and then refuse to answer the phone from the contractors for what amounts to being immature and ridiculous reasons. Being mature and responsible could eliminate many of the complaints that I

receive at the KRWA office. Ironically, those people who are acting like children are charged with the responsibility of providing services (including clean, fresh drinking water) to us and OUR children! Those people are also supposed to be “mature” enough to operate powerful, heavy equipment that is capable of leveling a house or destroying property and even taking a person's life with one accidental misstep or momentary lack of concentration. Yet, in some instances, it seems more important to “get back at somebody” instead of simply talking to them like a responsible adult to agree on a situation. It would be safer for all, if we could just eliminate drama and use common sense and rationality to perform the tasks that everyone is hired to do.

In light of the previously mentioned situation, where dramatic wrangling seems to entertain those who have nothing better to do, I am going to propose some different methods to efficiently and accurately call in or send in a locate request to the Notification Center.

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## Call it in

When you call 811, have all of your information prepared ahead of time. Reference materials can be downloaded at no cost from the Web site, [www.kansasonecall.com](http://www.kansasonecall.com). One of those is the Location Request Form. Filling out this form identifies all of the information that the caller is about to relay to the Call Center Operator. Having that form completed allows the caller to keep a record of the call, the time, the Notification Center representative, etc. if a need for that information arises in the future. There is a

section on the form where the description of the excavation location can be written down. It is a wise practice to be as detailed and specific as possible on this section. It is also prudent to visit the actual site in order to provide the best level of detail possible. Providing pedestal or terminal numbers, power pole numbers, distances and measurements, directions (N, S, E or W), and especially flagging or white-lining the route or zone are all preferred methods. “Guessing” is not. If providing detailed information based off of a location visit is absolutely not possible, take the time to contact affected utility owners or their locating services and discuss your intentions.

## Write-in ticket

ITIC is a software application that allows a user to file a locate request. It can be utilized 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Contacting a representative from the Call Center is the first step in registering for the program. It's free to use and provides necessary training and support. Once in a while, though, it seems that this convenience is not "good enough!" Even with the benefit of 24-hour access, free training and usage including unlimited requests, some users still get "lazy" when submitting locate tickets. Many tickets have been brought to my attention that still state something similar to "mark entire property from B Rd to C Rd, in and including the road right of way." Considering that the distance from B to C Rd is probably a mile, and there's no way of knowing whose property the caller is referring to, not to mention that it doesn't state which side of which road to mark, makes this an unacceptable locate request! It definitely warrants a call to the excavator from the utility, which is fine, however it is unnecessary. Providing specific measurements, directions and names or labels can make the process much more efficient for all parties. For example, "From the centerline of 240th Rd, mark 40 feet of the North Rd right-of-way, from the intersection of 240th & B Rd to the intersection of 240th & C Rd." or "At 603 Justiana St. in Seneca, KS, mark from the back of the house going N/NW to pedestal #101 in the City easement. Approx. 100 feet. Area is white-lined." Taking a few extra minutes to prepare could save a few hours repairing or arguing.



John Stroh of JS Sign Company in Manhattan, KS uses these signs to mark areas of excavation for locators to follow. He keeps signs in all of his work trucks and has never had an issue with locating services in more than ten years he's been using them.

## Innovation is encouraged

I encountered a bit of ingenuity recently in St Marys, Kansas. I was at a gas station and noticed unique signage along the route of a construction project.

I spoke with the owner of JS Signs who reported to me that he's been using a method of placing signs such as the one shown in the photograph for more than ten years. He

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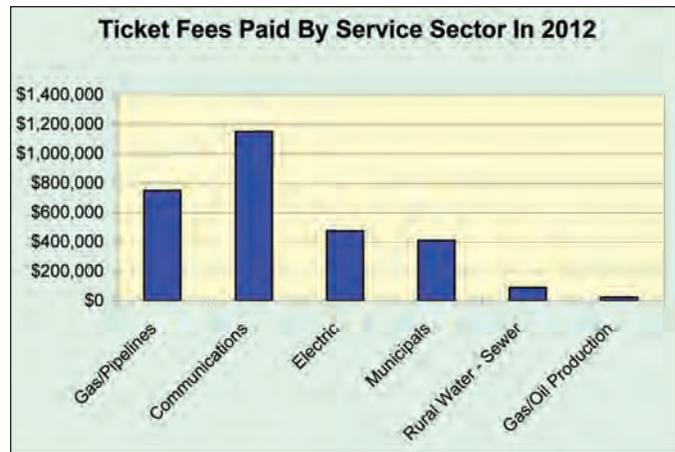
has never had a problem with a utility, or another contractor, or One Call – or the process. He adamantly encourages contractors and utilities to employ such practices. Having these signs posted helps save time, eliminates confusion and generally makes the entire locate process more efficient.

### Buffering

I have a suggestion for utilities as well. I've been focusing on how excavators can call in a locate request to ensure that it is accurate and specific in order to reduce expense, confusion and time spent in the field. Another way to become more efficient is for utilities to reduce the size of their notification boundary. This can also be done online through ITIC or with the help of a mapping service. For a rural water district, it can be done quite simply. If GPS data has been collected for the district, a “buffer” polygon can be placed around the lines so that when a locate is requested, if the area doesn't fall within that buffer polygon, the utility does not get notified, thus, the RWD manager doesn't have to locate it.



This graphic of a buffer polygon around a water line demonstrates how much area can be eliminated from a notification area that will reduce the number of errant tickets. If all utilities employed such practices, locating could be less time consuming and thus less costly.



The communication sector spent almost \$1.1 million in locating services in Kansas in 2012. RWDs (one of the only utilities to utilize GPS technologies) only spent about \$90,000.

If the RWD doesn't have GPS data collected for the infrastructure, system personnel can still zoom in to their service area and digitally draw an outline of any area they wish to receive notices for. Other utilities can do the same thing! If gas, communications, digital and other utilities would do this, it could reduce the burden on their locating services, thus reducing their overall expenditures and possibly increasing their profits or allowing them to pass those savings on to consumers. The communication industry paid roughly \$1.1 million for locating services in Kansas in 2012. If those expenses could simply be reduced by 10 percent, it could save customers over \$100,000 in operational costs. I'm willing to bet it could save more than that.

The Kansas Underground Utility Notification Center (KUUNC) is working on continuing to provide quality-locating services while utilizing new technologies and practices in order to make locating services in Kansas the best in the country. With your input, suggestions and support KUUNC will provide a service that employs the latest technologies,

has the highest safety standards and is the most efficient service available. I invite you to contact me at [pete@krwa.net](mailto:pete@krwa.net) for comments on this topic.

*Pete Koenig is GPS/GIS Mapping Coordinator at KRWA where he has been employed since 2004. He also has worked on KAN STEP projects and has been involved in other Association activities.*



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ROV inspections can be viewed on TV console during inspection & DVD provided. All inspections include bound reports, recommendations and cost estimates.

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