

Becoming more prepared for utility locates and better operations

The 2007 Kansas Legislative Session included several hearings on proposed legislation that would have mandated the full participation of water and wastewater systems in the Kansas One Call system. KRWA opposed that legislation, as did the League of Municipalities. KRWA will continue to oppose the mandatory participation in One Call. Even though it seems we've beaten this topic from all sides already, I think it's appropriate to review it again as preparations are being made for the 2008 Legislative Session.

First, there is no evidence that contractors and others are unduly damaging water or wastewater systems through excavation processes. Generally, when there is damage, it's due to contractor error, or failure to make contact with the utility in a timely manner. It has only been a rare occasion in the last 24 years that I have worked for KRWA that anyone ever reported that a water or wastewater system refused to locate its facilities and in turn was damaged. Instead, there is the continued problem of systems not being able to locate their facilities due to lack of good mapping – but they try and it is always assumed that if the pipeline cannot be located then there is no charge for damage should a line be hit. So we go back to the intent of the One Call notification program. That is to prevent damage to pipelines. Well, if such damage is

not occurring, then what's the fuss about mandatory participation?

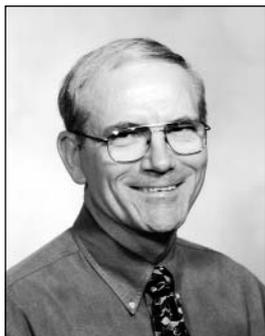
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but the contractor making the locate request doesn't know exactly where the excavation is going to take place. This is illogical and ends up costing the water utilities time and miles to chase each of

I think the legislative hearings brought out the real reason for proposing to have all utilities be members of One Call. I said it: It seems mostly to get excavators off the hook.

commented: "It seems mostly to get excavators off the hook. Make one phone call and that's it." Okay, well, that call requires many water systems, particularly the rural water districts that have pipelines for dozens if not up to 500 or more miles, to contact that contractor and ask where the excavation is

these down. In some systems, the number of locate requests is 15 to 30 per day. Some of these systems have one field operator. Explain how that operator is supposed to cover the operation of the water system and check on that many locate requests? It's not practical. The reality is that if the One Call



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planned. Many times, the contractor can't give a definite answer. Sometimes the contractor's office staff makes the request to One Call. The contractor has in some cases not even been issued a work order yet. So, the result is having water systems attempting to locate facilities, often with the request to "mark entire property" –

system were to narrow down the definition of the excavation, a big portion of these locate requests would not be necessary in the first place.

I worked for a large contractor that ran multiple crews on projects in several states, installing hundreds and hundreds of miles of rural water lines each year. As a contractor, the firm's bid for the project was prepared based on engineering drawings that included a general description of other utilities. If our review of the proposed project saw pipelines having to be installed through rats' nests of other utilities, obviously

that was a consideration in the bid. Twenty or more years ago, the proposed project drawings always included information such as approximate locations and contact information for existing utilities printed on the maps. Prior to construction, a ‘pre-construction job conference’ was held; the engineer, the funding agency, the contractors and the utilities that would need to be crossed attended it. Expectations of the owner were presented; contractors explained their proposed schedule. There were exchanges of information between the contractors and the phone, cable, electric, gas and oil pipeline utility representatives. The meeting would serve as the basis for many future contacts as the project proceeded.

I’ve spoken to some engineers who responded that they no longer detail all the existing utilities on plans. To do so takes time and increases liability for accuracy. The easy remedy is, "call One Call!" To cap that, some utility companies contract out locating services so there’s a new third party involved – and those personnel changes.

Where to start the fix?

KRWA has contended that mandating participation in One Call by all water and wastewater utilities will do nothing to help those systems locate their facilities. Larger cities see more costs because they are often their own excavator and if there’s a contract involved, there’s likely a permit process that will inform the contractor as to how the city will provide for locates.

The KRWA has stated and this magazine has carried numerous articles on the need for water and wastewater systems to have improved mapping. It is not acceptable for a water system governing body to not invest in having updated maps. Too often, everything about valve locations and some pipelines, etc. is contained in the mind of the

operator. In cases, that seems to be enough to have the operator become indispensable. But what happens if the operator is not available, or in worse case, is deceased? Numerous cities and rural water districts have

requiring systems to adopt technologies that will allow for better locating of their pipelines and facilities. While it should not be necessary to pass a new state law to require systems to map or update

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been met with this situation – and it’s not a pleasant experience. “Joe had this all in his head – but Joe is gone.”

There is some question whether some form of membership in One Call will be someday required. In the meantime, systems need to prepare themselves to make the process more efficient. Much less, a proposal that KRWA has discussed and which will be supported in legislation is something systems ought to be doing on their own anyway. What is it? Yes, it’s

the maps of their facilities, it’s more and more apparent that is the only means by which some system governing bodies may become more serious about this problem of inadequate mapping and inability to locate pipelines. While KRWA plans to support the legislation, it is not about KRWA providing mapping services. Anyone wanting to get into the business should jump right in; there’s more than enough to do.

The suggestions for new legislative proposals that have been



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discussed include the following:

1. All new or improved water transmission and distribution pipelines, wastewater pipelines and service lateral taps shall be locatable on and after July 1, 2008. "Locatable" means the ability to locate underground facilities within the 2-foot standard that is required by One Call. The process to make these lines locatable can be gained with the use of quality tracer wire, having pipeline of conductive material or using GPS technology.
2. Existing pipelines of 4 inches in diameter or larger would be required to be mapped. The same would be required for valves and manholes. Being "mapped" means being

- reasonably locatable within 5 feet either side of the line.
 3. Public waterlines with diameters less than 4 inches are to be mapped when such pipelines are repaired or otherwise visually located.
 4. Annually, maps should be updated.
- There is nothing sinister about suggesting that water and wastewater systems be required to improve their mapping. If anyone wants to debate that, please call and we'll make arrangements for you to go along on the next water loss survey where KRWA staff need to locate valves and pipelines. The help of another metal detector should make the job easier. In many cities, don't forget the pic ax because we're going to be

chopping through asphalt and maybe even cutting concrete to get to the valve riser or manhole cover. This is what KRWA staff members do, routinely. It'll only take a day or two of that to convince any skeptic that yes, systems need to improve their mapping for their own interests, regardless of any participation in One Call.

If your system would like to discuss options for mapping and see the various technologies, give KRWA at call at 785/336-3760 or email to krwa@krwa.net. KRWA staff will be pleased to attend any board or council or committee meetings to demonstrate GIS mapping and answer questions on how better maps will serve your system long term.

There's a wild goose here somewhere

There is concern by many water and wastewater systems over the number of inaccurate requests for cities and RWDs to locate their pipelines. These are commonly referred to in the industry as 'wasted tickets.' While the cost of the locate tickets can become significant at \$1.14 each, the real financial cost is the time and mileage required by water and wastewater systems to contact the contractor to determine exactly where the excavation is going to take place or to research the area. In the case of some 'contract' contractors, they simply don't know where the zone of excavation is; their head office simply makes one phone call to One Call and requests locates, sometimes involving 15 to 20 miles of work. So the question begs for an answer: If the excavator does not know where the zone of excavation is going to be, then how is a water or wastewater system supposed to locate their utilities?

The yellow highlighted area in the graphic at right shows the territory requested to be located by Nemaha RWD 3 north of Baileyville, Kan. Here are the problems with this request: 1) The RWD receiving the request does not even serve the area; 2) the system involved is not a member of One Call; 3) all but the one quarter section are not even owned by the person making the locate request. Regardless of possible error on the part of the caller, the locate could easily have been more restricted by One Call.



As shown, the area designated by One Call for locate is 3 miles wide. The locate request was called in by the farmer/landowner as he wanted to install a service line from his farmstead area to a new feedlot further within his property. The district receiving the request does not have a pipeline within 1.5 miles of the farmstead. And all too typical on these locate requests, the ticket was to "mark entire south side of the property which in this case, is a half-mile away from the actual work site."



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