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Know what's below before you start digging

There are many utility lines that are buried and unmarked in your yard, at your business, or on the farm. Before you put a shovel in the ground to tackle any project, large or small, call MISS DIG at 811. The Michigan Public Service Commission wants all Michiganders to stay safe when working outside.

Safe digging is important

If you strike a utility line it could result in the loss of critical service to you or your neighbors, injury or death, environmental pollution, or property damage. You do not know what is buried below ground and you cannot assume any utility infrastructure is deeper than you plan to dig.

All utilities have underground assets

Gas, water, sewer, electrical, and telecommunications all have buried lines throughout Michigan.

Call before you dig

Before starting any digging project, call MISS DIG at 811 so workers can identify where utility lines are on your property or at the job site. The call is free.






Three days before you begin a project, call 811 or go online to www.missdig.org to request that utility lines are marked in your work area. Even if you have hired a company to do the work, make sure they have called 811.

Next steps

When you call 811, a call center agent will take down the information about your project, whether it's tree planting, home improvement, a business expansion, or work on the farm. The call will only take a few minutes.

The information collected will be used to send technicians from your local utilities to the project site. They will use color-coded flags or spray paint to mark where utility lines lie underground.

How to tell the flags apart

-  Yellow indicates a gas or liquid pipeline
-  Orange marks telephone, cable, or signal
-  Green is for sewer
-  Blue shows water
-  Red alerts you to electric or lighting

Use caution after area is flagged

Once the area is marked you can start your project, making sure to stay about four feet away from any marked lines. If you need to cross the markings or dig closer than four feet to the marks or flags, then you need to carefully use hand tools to expose the buried utility lines.

Utility line depths

The depth of the lines varies with the type and size of the utility asset. Larger utility lines are typically installed at greater depths. Marking utility lines does not indicate how deep the line is. Utility line depths can change over the years due to erosion, previous projects, or uneven surfaces. That can mean a utility line is closer to the surface than you think.

When a utility line is struck

It could be very dangerous. If you are using construction equipment and you strike a natural gas or liquid pipeline it could cause significant property damage, injury, or death. Striking an electrical line could cause electrocution or interrupt service. Damage to telecommunications lines and cables can cut service to your home, business, or neighborhood. If you strike a line, call 911 first to report the emergency and then call your local utility.

Utility line mishaps are common

In Michigan, there are thousands of incidents each year where lines are struck during construction projects. Nationwide, every nine minutes an underground utility line is damaged because someone started to dig without first calling 811, according to Common Ground Alliance, the national association dedicated to protecting underground utility lines.

When to remove utility flags

The flags should be removed by the person who called in the MISS DIG request. If they did not remove the flags, call 811 and ask who requested the utilities be located and then contact the original caller to see if they have completed their digging project.

The Gold Shovel Standard

Ask your contractor whether they have



Gold Shovel Standard certification, which recognizes best-in-class performance by Michigan's excavators. If a contractor has Gold Shovel Standard certification, it means they have shown a commitment

to safe digging practices and continued training of their employees.

For more information on safe digging

Visit www.missdig.org. To request facilities be marked, dial 811

