

Roth: Safe digging month and the web beneath us

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on April 18, 2016.



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This time of year many Americans are coming out of their homes and their winter hibernations and beginning to tackle outdoor activities like gardening and projects around the home. But before you dig into spring projects, make sure you practice safe digging.

The Common Ground Alliance, a national organization dedicated to underground damage prevention, has proclaimed April as Safe

Digging Month. Excavation damage is one of the leading causes of pipeline accidents and the unfortunate injuries that occur.

It is recommended that we Call 811 at least a few days before starting any digging project. Whether you are planning to do it yourself or hire a professional, smart digging means calling 811 before each job. Data shows that when one calls 811 the appropriate amount of time before digging, there is less than a 1-percent chance of striking a buried utility line.

Here are a few things to know about the massive web of lines, pipes, wires and utilities underground here in Oklahoma and across America. An underground utility line is damaged once every six minutes nationwide because someone decided to dig without first learning what improvements exist below the surface of the earth. Digging without knowing the approximate location of underground utilities can result in damage to gas, electric, communications, water and sewer lines, which can lead to service disruptions, costly repairs, serious injuries and even death.

For decades, and in some places for centuries, common utilities, lines and infrastructure have been placed just below the surface to carry many life necessities from point A to B. According to the Common Ground Alliance, there are more than 20 million miles of underground utilities in the United States, according to data compiled from various industry groups. That figure equates to more than one football field's length (105 yards) of buried utilities for every man, woman and child in the U.S. And in an energy-producing state like ours, the intricate web is vast, including natural gas gathering systems, high-pressure transmitting pipelines and many other aspects of energy production and market distribution.

In Oklahoma, please call Oklahoma One-Call System Inc. at 811 or 1-800-522-6543. And if you will call no sooner than 48

hours they will be able to mark the areas on inquiry, and those markings, paint or flags should be safely valid for 10 days for you to dig.

The Oklahoma One-Call System Inc. (OKIE811) is a nonprofit 501(c)6 corporation, incorporated in the state of Oklahoma in 1979. It was formed for the purpose of preventing damage to underground facilities. Thirty-seven companies originally joined to fund a statewide one-call notification center. On April 22, 1981, Gov. Henry Bellmon signed into law an act known as the Oklahoma Underground Facilities Damage Prevention Act. The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Cal Hobson of Lexington and Rep. John Monks of Muskogee, became effective Jan. 1, 1982. The act provided that owners and operators of underground facilities must register through a notification system and all excavators must give notice to such underground operators at the notification system prior to excavation. Many lives have been saved because this system exists.

So please enjoy this wonderful spring weather and feel confident to tackle your excavation projects, but please first protect your life and your property by contacting 811 and learning what all exists below the surface of the land where you live, walk, work, drive, dig and garden.

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