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Survey finds 51 percent of homeowners who plan to dig will put themselves and others at risk by not calling 811 before starting

DIYers' failure to call 811 before digging for landscaping and other projects can damage underground gas, electric, communications, water and sewer lines

WASHINGTON (March 25, 2014) – The Common Ground Alliance (CGA), the organization dedicated to protecting underground utility lines and the safety of people who dig near them, today announced results from a recent survey that found 51 percent of American homeowners who plan to dig this year for projects that include landscaping, installing a fence or mailbox, and building a deck or patio, will put themselves and communities at risk by not calling 811 to learn the approximate location of underground utilities.

Additionally, 67 percent of the surveyed homeowners who plan to dig reported knowing that paint and flags are used to mark buried utilities, indicating that awareness of underground infrastructure among “DIYers” is high, even if their awareness of the importance of calling 811 before digging is relatively low.

Digging without knowing the approximate location of underground utilities increases the likelihood of an unintentional damage, which can cause serious injuries, service disruptions and repair costs. An underground utility line is damaged every six minutes nationwide because someone decided to dig without first calling 811, according to CGA data.

There are more than 100 billion feet of underground utilities in the United States, according to data compiled by CGA 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.

Everyone who calls 811 a few days before digging is connected to a local one call notification center that will take the caller’s information and communicate it to local utility companies. Professional locators will then visit the dig site to mark the approximate location of underground utility lines with spray paint or flags. Once a site has been accurately marked, it is safe to begin digging around the marked areas.

“According to the survey results, homeowners who plan to dig this year know the paint marks and flags on the ground are used to identify underground utilities, but among these ‘DIYers,’ more than half will not call 811, increasing the chances for injuries and utility service outages in their neighborhoods,” said CGA President Bob Kipp. “With spring upon us, tens of millions of homeowners will reach for their shovels and begin digging for landscape and other home improvement projects. It is critical for them to pick up the phone and make a free call to 811 a few days before those projects begin.”

This national public opinion survey of 592 homeowners, conducted Feb. 26 – March 2, also found that homeowners will call 811 for certain projects, but not for all DIY landscape projects. Homeowners will not call 811 for the following DIY projects:

- 84 percent – Planting shrubs
- 63 percent – Planting a tree
- 61 percent – Installing a pole for a basketball goal
- 50 percent – Building a deck
- 46 percent – Installing a fence
- 45 percent – Digging a patio

The survey also identified top reasons why people do not plan to call 811 before digging. Fifty-six percent said that they felt they already knew where utilities were buried on their property, and 47 percent did not think they would dig deep enough to come in contact with utility lines, despite the fact that utilities can sometimes be just a few inches below the surface due to erosion and other topography changes.

CGA's 1,500 members, the U.S. Department of Transportation, most governors and many mayors have proclaimed April as National Safe Digging Month as a way to bring extra attention to the issue and reduce the risk of unnecessary infrastructure damage.

As part of National Safe Digging Month, CGA encourages homeowners to take the following steps when planning a digging project this spring:

- Always call 811 a few days before digging, regardless of the depth or familiarity with the property.
- Plan ahead. Call on Monday or Tuesday for work planned for an upcoming weekend, providing ample time for the approximate location of lines to be marked.
- Confirm with your local one call center that all lines have been marked.
- Learn what the various colors of paint and flags represent at www.call811.com/faqs.
- Consider moving the location of your project if it is near utility line markings.
- If a contractor has been hired, confirm that a call to 811 has been made. Don't allow work to begin if the lines aren't marked.

About CGA

CGA is a member-driven association of 1,500 individuals, organizations and sponsors in every facet of the underground utility industry. Established in 2000, CGA is committed to saving lives and preventing damage to underground infrastructure by promoting effective damage prevention practices. CGA has established itself as the leading organization in an effort to reduce damages to underground facilities in North America through shared responsibility among all stakeholders. For more information, visit CGA on the web at www.commongroundalliance.com.

About the study

International Communications Research (ICR) conducted a national omnibus phone study between Feb. 26 and March 2, 2014, on behalf of CGA. A total of 592 American homeowners ages 18+ were asked for their opinions on home and property improvement project topics. The survey had a margin of error that varied from +2.2 percent to +5.7 percent, depending on the particular survey question.

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