

Berntsen International: Encourages homeowners, contractors to always call before digging

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National 811 Day Promotes Safe Digging Practices to Protect Underground Utilities

MADISON, Wisconsin—Out of sight and often out of mind, underground utilities—electricity, gas, water, telephone and high-speed Internet—are vital to our everyday life. Yet every ten minutes an underground utility is damaged because someone digs without calling 811.

Known as Diggers Hotline in Wisconsin, 811 is a national network of call centers that provide valuable information to homeowners and contractors about the location of underground utilities. Every digging project requires a call to 811. Calling a few days ahead gives utility companies time to have locators mark underground utilities with flags or spray paint or both.

To promote safe digging awareness, one-call organizations across the nation observe August 11 as National 811 Day. “We want to do everything we can to promote that message,” said Mike Klonsinski, president of Berntsen International, an innovation leader in infrastructure marking solutions.

This year’s 811 Day is a somber one following the July 10 explosion that rocked downtown Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, destroying five buildings, six businesses and a home. Sun Prairie volunteer fire department captain Cory Barr, 34, died after injuries he suffered while responding to the blast. Eleven emergency responders

and citizens were injured. Workers for a private contractor punctured a four-inch gas main, causing a leak that resulted in the explosion, according to press reports.

Although progress has been made over the past decade to reduce utility damage, there is still much work to be done. According to the 2016 Annual DIRT Report published by the Common Ground Alliance (CGA), an estimated 379,000 underground utilities were damaged in the US alone—a 20% increase over 2015. CGA's report estimates the societal costs of utility damages at \$1.5 billion. CGA's mission is to reduce damages to underground infrastructure in North America.

Accidental hits to utilities have many causes, including failure to call 811, antiquated maps or inaccurate information on where the underground utilities are buried.

Utility locators need to mark lines for homeowner projects, ranging from installing a rural mailbox to putting up a fence or building a deck. Homeowners who hire contractors for projects are advised to make sure the contractor has called 811. Hitting an underground utility line can cause serious injuries, service outages for entire neighborhoods, emergency situations, fines and repair costs.

Though the nearby explosion and aftermath in Sun Prairie continues to weigh heavily on the staff at Berntsen, the company sees a better and safer future.

"We're on the threshold of a new era of change in the way we locate and manage underground infrastructure," Klonsinski said. "Traditional locating practices are being replaced by innovative technologies that will significantly improve public safety and reduce accidental hits to these critical assets. And most importantly, save lives."

ABOUT BERNTSEN:

Founded in 1972, Madison, Wisconsin-based Berntsen International Inc. provides traditional and smart marking solutions to the utility, survey and construction industries. The company's high-quality product line of 1,000 markers and monuments can be found in more than 100 countries. For more information visit www.BerntsenInternational.com.