



Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia
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Press Release

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Mayor Muriel Bowser Recognizes April as Safe Digging Month

On Earth Day, the Commission encourages District residents to always call 811 two days before digging

Today Mayor Muriel Bowser and the Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia remind District residents of safe digging practices as a part of Safe Digging Month. Mayor Bowser issued a proclamation recognizing April as Safe Digging Month in the District of Columbia. The Mayor and the Commission recognize that many people will plant trees in the spring especially on Earth Day and Arbor Day, so it is important to remember to call 811 two working days before any digging project to ensure the environment is not damaged and prevent striking an underground utility line.

“As April marks the traditional start of digging season, we are using this month to strongly encourage individuals and companies to call 811 before they begin digging,” said Mayor Bowser. “By calling 811 to have the underground utility lines in their area marked, homeowners and professionals are making an important decision that can help keep them and their communities safe and connected.”

“The Public Service Commission is educating excavators and homeowners about safe digging practices and preventing service interruptions, damage to the environment and personal injury,” stated Betty Ann Kane, Chairman of the Commission. “We can save time, money and keep our neighborhoods safe and connected by making a simple call to 811 in advance of any digging project throughout the entire year.”

When calling 811, homeowners and contractors are connected to the District’s local one call center, which notifies the appropriate utility companies of their intent to dig. Professional locators are sent to the requested digging site to mark the approximate locations of underground lines with flags or spray paint within 18 inches of either side (total 36 inches of both sides) of the underground facility if the proposed excavation is within five feet horizontally of the underground facility. Once lines have been properly marked, digging can begin around the marked lines. According to District law, mechanized equipment shall not be used within 36 inches of a marked utility line. Hand digging or vacuum excavation is recommended within this “tolerance zone.”

Every six minutes an underground utility line is damaged because someone decided to dig without first calling 811. Striking a single line can cause injury, repair costs, fines and inconvenient outages. Every digging project, no matter how large or small, warrants a call to 811. Installing a mailbox, building a deck and planting a tree or garden are all examples of digging projects that should only begin a few days after a call to 811.

The depth of utility lines can vary for a number of reasons, such as erosion, previous digging projects and uneven surfaces. Utility lines need to be properly marked because even when digging only a few inches, the risk of striking an underground utility line still exists.

The Commission encourages District residents to visit www.call811.com for more information about digging safely.

The Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia is an independent agency established by Congress in 1913 to regulate electric, natural gas, and telecommunications companies in the District of Columbia.

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