

Safety Flash

Incident with property/utility damage

Incident: A subcontractor had been working two days to expose existing utilities for rerouting an 8-inch sanitary line for a new building foundation. The crew had previously located and exposed six utilities by probing and digging. On the morning of the second day, they had exposed a 2-inch water line, 4½ feet deep, and were digging about 6-12 inches away to set a trench box when the excavator bucket encountered a buried 8-inch plastic pipe about 3 feet long and pushed it into the 2-inch water line, causing a leak.

Possible contributing factors

- The plastic pipe section had been left in the ground during previous work by an unknown contractor.
- Crew did not expect to find debris under the utilities.
- The buried pipe was perpendicular to the water line and directly under a threaded joint.

Primary contributing factor

- The plastic pipe section had been left in the ground during previous work by an unknown contractor.

Potential solutions

- Continue to review existing drawings and history with the owner before beginning excavations.
- Consider using utility locating services like OUPS and GPRS.
- Continue to use a spotter when excavating close to utilities and make sure spotters are located where they can see obstructions.
- Ensure that no debris remains in the excavation and backfill includes only clean, suitable material, per contract documents.

ACTIONS

- A meeting was held with RLI and subcontractors to discuss the duties of spotters.
- A meeting was held with subcontractors to ensure that all debris is removed from the excavation before backfilling with clean, suitable fill, and they will contact RLI if there are issues.