

Lesson Learned: Keep your Pipes at a Comfortable Distance!

What Occurred: In November 2010 our member was notified that one of Puget Sound Energy's (PSE) natural gas lines was too close to one of the District's water main lines. The District was then notified by PSE that either the District had to move the line, or they would.

When PSE attempted to tap their gas main for a new service line they discovered the District's eight inch water main was installed directly on top of PSE's two inch gas line, with a one inch separation between the two lines. The gas line was installed in 1966 in accordance with a franchise agreement with King County, which was an extension of a previous agreement that allowed PSE to locate their facilities in the Right of Way. Regulatory and industry standards require that there is at least a one foot clearance between PSE's gas lines and any other facility. The District's water main was installed in the 1980's.

What Resulted: PSE contacted the District and asked them to come out and move their water main to at least one foot from their gas line. The District told PSE that they would not be moving their water line. Fortunately only a portion of the District's water main line was over the PSE gas line. PSE proceeded to move the section of the District's water main and invoiced the District for payment of the costs.

Direct Costs: The total paid loss was **\$38,500**.
Costs were for water main relocation only.

Indirect Costs: The District's labor and expense in coordination, interviews, and document gathering was estimated to total **30** hours for an indirect/non-insurable cost of approximately **\$1,000**.

Contributing Factors:

1. Entity responsible for the initial installation of the water main failed to adhere to regulations in regards to installation proximity for water mains adjacent to natural gas lines.
2. When the issue arose, District did not contact outside resources (WSRMP, Utility Coordinating Council, etc.) for advice on handling this situation.

Root Cause:

1. The District told PSE that they would not relocate the installed water main. The District did not call WSRMP or the Utility Coordinating Council to obtain advice on going forward with this issue in the safest way possible.



Best Practices to Consider - Lessons Learned to Prevent Recurrence:

1. The District needs to follow quality assurance protocol (specifications, inspections, etc.) to ensure that all of its workers and contractors follow the guidelines and regulations regarding installation of facilities or infrastructure near other utilities.
2. Prior to design and construction of all facilities, the District should obtain asbuilt drawings from all local utilities. Since some utility asbuilts for flexible pipe (such as power and gas) are not specific enough to determine exact locations, have Locate Services mark all utilities prior to design. Pothole all utilities that may conflict with the proposed facilities to verify location and depth.
3. Leverage all available resources to obtain advice (legal counsel, WSRMP or the Utility Coordinating Council) regarding the best way to move forward with a request like this from another entity.
4. If the District is notified by another entity that there is a problem with the location or installation of their infrastructure, the steps we recommend you follow include:
 - a. Verify and document the validity of the complaint.
 - b. Review the project files to determine if the existing utility was previously located and if the affected Utility properly asbuilt the installation. Determine if the utility was originally encountered during construction and if it was, why was the new facility installed without proper separation.
 - c. Call the WSRMP to get advice on how to proceed to help avoid any claims arising from the issue.
 - d. If necessary, consider how the infrastructure of concern fits in with the District's capital program and how it might be moved, upgraded or changed in the future.

Overcommunicate for Success, Undercommunicate and Have a Mess!

For additional information about this, and other Water and Sewer risk management programs, please contact Leah Vergosen at (425) 452-9750 or LeahV@wsrmp.org

This claim has been sanitized for risk management training purposes.