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PSC Chairman Urges Montanans to Call 811 before You Dig

Planting some trees? Pounding in a new mailbox? Adding on a deck? The Public Service Commission (PSC) urges Montanans to stay safe by calling 811 before beginning any digging project.

"Despite the snowy weather today, many people will soon be working on projects that involve moving dirt," said PSC Chairman Bill Gallagher. "Before picking up a shovel, please pick up the phone to call 811 and avoid liability or worse, serious injury. It's quick, easy, and it's the law."

Calls to 811 are directed to a local call center and the variety of affected utilities. Utility staff will then come out to your project area, usually within 2-3 business days of your initial call, and mark any underground utility lines. The entire process is free to callers. Different colors of paint or stakes are used to identify what kind of utility line is buried below the ground. They include:

- Red – Electric
- Yellow – Gas/Petroleum Pipe Line
- Orange – Communications, Telephone/CATV
- Blue – Potable Water
- Purple – Reclaimed Water
- Green – Sewer/Drainage.

The depth of utility lines varies significantly and there may be multiple utility lines in one area. Also, some utility lines are only a few inches below the surface, making them easy to strike even during shallow digging projects, such as plantings. If you hit an underground utility line while digging, you can harm yourself or those around you, disrupt service to an entire neighborhood, and potentially be responsible for fines and repair costs. April 2011 has again been designated "National Safe Digging Month," dedicated to increasing awareness of safe digging practices across the country. It also celebrates the creation of the national call-before-you-dig number. In 2005, the Federal Communications Commission designated 811 as the national call-in number for homeowners and professional excavators to call before digging. Additional information on this nationwide program can be found at www.call811.com.

Made up of 5 elected commissioners, the PSC works to ensure that Montanans receive safe and reliable service from regulated public utilities while paying reasonable rates. Utilities regulated by the PSC generally include private investor-owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water, and sewer companies. In addition, the PSC regulates certain motor carriers, and oversees natural gas pipeline safety and intrastate railroad safety.

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