

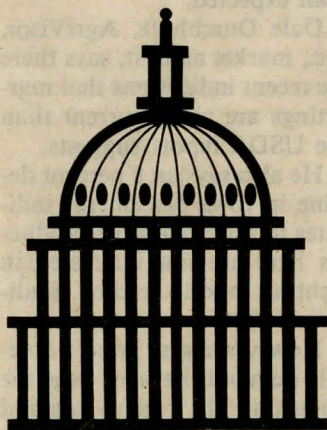
Local officials unexcited about one call notification

By Dal Grooms

"You take Joe Blow farmer, who thinks he lives in a free country, and he can't even put a fence in his back forty without having to wait for someone from the utility companies to come out and bless the area."

That's how Marion County engineer Abie Davis expects farmers will share his frustration about a bill passed by the Iowa Legislature this year.

Issue Update



Referred to as the one call bill (SF 2133), the legislation will require all utility companies to become members of Iowa One Call if they have buried lines or pipes in the state. This allows anyone doing grading, trenching, digging and other excavation work to make one call to discover what lines or pipes are buried in an area where work will be conducted.

The response time to a query is 48 hours. That's one of the complaints Davis has. His other complaint is the penalties that can occur if work is done without using the one call system.

But delay and penalty are not the reasons for enacting Iowa One Call, says the lobbyist who worked for its passage. And neither was it meant to frustrate farmers or county engineers.

Craig Walter, who lobbied for several major utility companies, said the two major reasons for the law were safety and cost. That is the safety of farmers or excavation workers who might cut into a line, such as natural gas, and the cost of repairs because utilities were not notified when they needed to do a locate (mark where the utility line is).

Walter noted that there has been an Iowa One Call, but it has not been as effective as the new system will be because only 125 utilities belonged. The new law, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 1993, mandates that all of Iowa's 1,800 utilities become members.

With the limited membership, "operators could tell callers that the member utilities were being contacted to request locates, but it was still up to the caller to figure out who else needed to be contacted.

"This system is going to make it convenient for anyone doing digging," Walter said.

More regulation

County engineer Davis disagrees. He says the law is over-regulation, creates more work, and keeps his department from reacting to problems in a timely manner.

For example, Davis says he has had to assign one person to spend about 2 hours each day coordinating one call requests and responses. It also slows down replacement of road signs if they cannot be returned to the same hole they came from. If a new hole is being dug, a one call request must be made.

Walter says the bill faced concerns, rather than opposition, while being debated in the Legislature.

The Iowa Farm Bureau's concern about the bill was how it would effect farming practices. To answer the concern, the bill exempted normal farming operations, such as plowing,

cultivation, planting and harvesting. Also exempted was replacing a post when repairing a fence.

Farm operations not exempted were cultivation practices, such as chisel plowing, sub-soiling or ripping, when they exceed 15 inches in depth. Other farm work that requires the use of the one call system

are drain tile excavation, terracing, digging or driving a post in a new location.

Fines

Fines will apply after Jan. 1, 1993, if you fail to call Iowa One Call about excavation and digging work covered by the law. The fines for digging near or striking a natural gas or haz-

ardous liquid pipeline can be as much as \$10,000 per day. For violations relating to other underground utilities, the fine can be up to \$1,000 per day.

Walter said the one call system is not going to be as burdensome as Davis foresees.

The current Iowa One Call number, 800-292-8989, will continue under the new law.