

Calling 811 Before Digging - Colorado Specific Rules

The phone number 811 and the website www.call811.org provide a one-stop contact for homeowners, business, and counties to notify local utility companies before they begin excavation in an area. Excavation is defined as “any operation in which earth is moved or removed by means of any tools, equipment, or explosives and included auguring, backfilling, boring, ditching, grading, plowing-in, ripping, scraping, trenching, and tunneling.”

The state of Colorado offers further guidance and additional regulations for people planning to excavate. You can access specific Colorado regulations by visiting www.co811.org.

Upon contacting 811 either by phone or at their website, callers are given a locate number confirming that notice of excavation was given. This number should be retained for future reference. 811 will then notify local utility companies of the upcoming work so that they can send an employee out to mark any underground utility lines in the area. Excavators must contact 811 at least three days prior to beginning excavation.

Road Excavation

Routine maintenance of unpaved roads (i.e., road grading) requires that counties contact 811 before beginning work. Senate Bill 18-167, passed this year, now allows governmental entities, such as counties, to do the following:

..., if an excavation notice is limited to only annual road maintenance that does not exceed six inches in depth conducted by a governmental agency on an existing unpaved road, the marking shall be considered valid for up to one hundred eighty days.

County employees should still call 811 three days prior to beginning work. Then if they arrive at the worksite and find that no markings are present, they should call a second time and get another locate number. They should then wait for a reasonable amount of time before proceeding with the work.

Emergency Requests

From the Colorado Excavator Handbook Safe Digging Guide:

An Emergency Request is a Locate Request for which immediate excavation is necessary to prevent the loss of life, damage to property, or damage to underground facilities, making advance notice for the proposed excavation impractical under the circumstances.

Emergency Requests are prioritized ahead of all other types of Locate Requests, and facility owner(s)/operator(s) will respond as soon as practicable. Should the facility owner(s)/operator(s) fail to respond as outlined in the Recommended Facility Owner Response, [which states that they “should respond to all business-hour emergencies within one (1) hour”] the excavator should request a Second Notice and contact the facility owner(s) directly.

Please note that the excavator must be at the excavation site within the “applicable time frame” for the Facility Owner to respond. For after hours emergency calls, those not between 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, the recommended response time for facility owners is within a 2-hour time frame. If a facility owner is unable to respond within the recommended time frame, he or she should contact the excavator and provide an estimated arrival time.

What This Means for Counties

Colorado counties need to call 811 at least 3 days in advance and receive a locate number before doing any excavation projects, including road grading deeper than 6 inches and new landscaping projects. If county personnel arrive at the worksite and are unable to locate any utilities markings, they should call 811 a second time and then wait a reasonable amount of time for a response before doing any digging. For more information, consult www.co811.org or call CTSI Loss Prevention at 303 861 0507. 