

NPL CONSTRUCTION



IMPLEMENTING SAFETY IN THIS HIGH RISK BUSINESS

by Kevin Kemper

NPL CONSTRUCTION CO. IS THE nation's largest gas distribution contractor, installing over 15 million feet of pipe and wire annually, with employment of over 2,500 people. Mike Kemper, CEO and president of NPL, explained how important safety is within the energy industry. "Employees like to work at NPL because we do provide a safe working environment for them, and good employees are our most important asset," he said.

Continuing NPL's emphasis on safety, Kemper has taken the lead in tackling

what he sees as the biggest safety issue currently facing the utility industry, cross-bored sewer laterals. He believes that the solution should start within the industry even though the problem is "first and foremost a public safety issue."

It is possible for underground contractors to install utility lines directly through sewer laterals, the pipes that connect a building's sewage system to the city's main sewer lines. These breached pipes are called 'cross-bored sewer laterals', and they can occur even with conscientious pipeline

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installation. The possibility arises when using trenchless technology. A simplified definition for this type of technology would include any machine that operates underground, out of sight, to create a hole through which a utility line will be installed. There is a limited risk of breaching any utility lines (water, telephone, cable, electric, gas) other than sewer with this technology because there is already legislation mandating that, prior to any underground construction, utilities must come out and mark the

location of their existing lines. Sewer laterals are the only pipes that are not consistently marked.

The danger from a cross-bored sewer lateral arises when a plumber is called out to the building to clear out a blocked lateral. Often, a plumber will use a rotary cutting device to clear out the sewer lateral and this will cause the implanted utility line to rupture. The worst damage from this scenario can occur with a ruptured gas line. If gas leaks in to the building and ignites, the consequences are devastating.

NPL sees the solution to this problem in three parts: legislation, enforcement, and technology. New legislation will mandate that sewer lines everywhere must be marked, according to the same laws governing all other underground facilities. Enforcement of existing legislation is another obvious and integral part of the solution. Lastly, new technology may someday make it easier to locate sewer lines so that cross-bores do not occur. ABQ

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