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Buried Utilities and Safety

It is important to know the location of underground utility lines on job sites. Rupturing or breaking underground utilities, such as electrical power cables and gas lines can result in serious injuries or even death.

A Worksite Story:

A construction crew was using an auger to dig a hole to anchor a utility pole support cable. Suddenly the auger hit a small plastic gas line. Escaping gas soon reached a nearby building, where it ignited about 20 minutes later. Four people died and 15 were injured. In addition, three buildings were destroyed and more than a dozen others had extensive damage.

- What caused this incident?
- How could this have been prevented?
- Have you ever been injured while working around buried utilities, or do you know someone who has? If so, what happened?

Remember This Before Digging:

- Check with your supervisor to make sure utility companies have been notified and that all underground lines have been properly marked. – Look for paint, flags, or stakes marking locations of electrical lines (marked red) and gas lines (marked yellow). – Electrical lines should also have a warning device, such as a range control or limit.
- If you do not see any markings and are on public land, you can call 811 to make sure that it is safe to dig.
 - If you are on private property, ask your supervisor or the property owner to have a private utility locating service locate the utilities before you start digging.
- Review marked-out areas. They may not be exact. If you are not sure about the markings, ask your supervisor or call the utility company to verify before digging.
- Plan to dig by hand when working within 2 feet of a mark-out, to make sure you do not hit a utility line or conduit with heavy equipment. Ask your supervisor or call the expert who will review the work area before work begins and as needed during your shift.

When digging:

- Look for: – Signs of previous digging – Changes in soil types – Asphalt patches or depressions – Concrete, plastic, or gravel.
- If you hit a line, you must report it! If it is a gas line, evacuate everyone immediately, secure the area, and call the fire department and the gas utility company.