

One Call Board of Texas

FAQs

1. **What does DIG SAFELY mean?**

DIG SAFELY is a nationally recognized safety program developed by an industry wide group of experts from all stakeholder groups including excavators and utility operators. The purpose is to increase excavation safety and reduce dangerous and expensive damage to vital underground utilities. The Office of Pipeline Safety of the US Department of Transportation introduced it. The DIG SAFELY message is at the heart of the Texas One-Call law. A simple way to remember is “DIG WITH CARE”:

CALL BEFORE YOU DIG (see #2 below)

ALWAYS WAIT THE REQUIRED TIME (see #3 below)

RESPECT THE MARKS (see #4 below)

EXCAVATE WITH CARE (see #5 below)

2. Remember, DIG SAFELY and DIG WITH CARE...

It makes good sense, it's free and IT'S THE LAW!

3. **Do I have to call before I dig in Texas?**

YES. The Texas One-Call law requires anyone (with a few exceptions such as cemeteries) to call at least 2 working days (48 hours excluding weekends and holidays) before you dig if you are planning on digging 16 inches or deeper using mechanical equipment.

4. **How long do I have to wait?**

The Texas One-Call law requires anyone (with a few exceptions such as cemeteries) to call at least 2 working days (48 hours excluding weekends and holidays) before you dig if you are planning on digging 16 inches or deeper using mechanical equipment.

5. **What do the different colors used to mark underground utilities mean?**

The Texas One-Call law requires excavators and utility operators to use the [APWA Color Codes](#). Clicking on the link above can access the Color Codes and the American Public Works Association (APWA) link can be found in the OTHER LINKS section.

6. **Once the lines are marked, am I free to dig away?**

NO. The marks only indicate the approximate location of the underground utilities. It is still your responsibility to EXCAVATE WITH CARE. Be aware of warning signs, marked lines and any other obstacle to safe digging. Also note that the Texas One-Call law does NOT require water and sewer operators to be members of the Texas Notification System. You may need to contact them directly.

7. **When do I need to call again?**

That depends on the circumstances. Section 251.151 of the Texas One-Call law states “... a person who intends to excavate shall notify a notification center not earlier than the 14th day before the excavation is to begin...” Initially this was interpreted to mean that a locate notice or “ticket” expired after 14 days, the so-called “14-Day Rule”. However, the Texas Attorney General has issued Opinion No. JC-0234. The summary states:

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“An excavator that properly notifies a notification center of a planned excavation under section 251.151 of the Utilities Code no more than fourteen days nor no less than forty-eight hours before the excavation is expected to commence must notify the notification center again if the commencement is delayed beyond fourteen days of the original notice”.

As you can see, no mention is made of a ticket expiring once excavation has commenced. However, ultimately the excavator is responsible for knowing the condition of the excavation site and when the marks have been wiped out or moved and need to be refreshed. Therefore, the One-Call Board has directed the Notification Center to accept any re-locates requested by excavators and not to discourage such re-locates by advising that they are not required.

8. What is the “14-day Rule”?

See #6 above.

9. How close can I dig to the marked lines?

It is the excavator’s responsibility to avoid damaging marked lines and no specific tolerance or hand-dig zone is specified in the Texas One-Call law. However, APWA and several industries accepted Best Practices set 18” on either side of the marked utility as a reasonable tolerance zone. Within that zone it is recommended that hand digging, or other acceptable method be used to locate the exact location of the utility before more extensive excavation is started.

10. Do I have to call every 10 days if I am still working on a job?

NO but ultimately the excavator is responsible for knowing the condition of the excavation site and when the marks need to be refreshed. While not required by the Texas One-Call law it is another way to DIG SAFELY and DIG WITH CARE. See also #6 above.

11. What is “white-lining”?

APWA standard Color Codes required by the Texas One-Call law use white paint to define the limits of a proposed excavation. Where practical this is a Best Practice and allows the utility locators to work quicker and more accurately by concentrating on marking underground facilities in the exact excavation site.

12. How deep must I dig before I have to call? The Texas One-Call law requires anyone (with a few exceptions such as cemeteries) to call at least 2 working days (48 hours excluding weekends and holidays) before you dig if you are planning on digging 16 inches or deeper using mechanical equipment.

13. What should I do when I have given proper notice, waited the required time and a utility operator does not show up to mark?

The Texas One-Call law does not require a second notice but it is a good idea to either contact that utility directly or call the Notification Center and ask that a “Second Notice” be sent. If there is still no response you may proceed but use extreme caution until you have located the unmarked line.

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14. What is Positive Response?

Positive Response is a system that closes the communication loop between the excavator and utility operator by informing the excavator when and if the lines are marked. In Texas we have a modified form of Positive Response in that the utility operator is required by law to notify the excavator only in the event that the utility operator does not feel that it is necessary to mark their line at the excavation site. In other words, if the Notification Centers tells you that 10 utilities are being notified of your planned excavation, then you should have 10 marks on the ground. If only 8 utilities are marked, the other 2 should send you a fax or email telling you they don't intend to mark.

15. What is an Emergency locate?

The Texas One-Call law defines an emergency as “...excavation that is necessary to respond to a situation that endangers life, health, or property or a situation in which the public need for uninterrupted service ...compels immediate action.” Under these circumstances the excavator may begin emergency excavation immediately but must take reasonable precautions to protect underground facilities. In addition, the excavator should notify a Notification Center as soon as reasonably possible. Practically speaking, it is best to call before you dig and wait as long as possible to allow all underground utilities in the area to be notified and marked. However, the law recognizes that each situation is different and must be handled accordingly. In all cases it is the excavator's responsibility to use all possible caution in digging around unmarked lines.

16. What is a Short Notice locate?

This is an illegal ticket because the excavation begins before the required 2 working days waiting period (see also #3 above). Calling for a locate but not allowing adequate time disrupts the system and is a violation of the Texas One-Call law. This could make you subject to a civil penalty in addition to any damage you cause. Also note that calling an illegal “Short Notice” locate an “Emergency” does not automatically make it a legal ticket.

17. Why does it take so long to get the lines marked?

The Texas Notification System handles over 2 million incoming calls each year and each incoming locate request could generate up to 10 – 12 notices to utilities. This is a tremendous workload in a very big state. The utility companies and their locator services make every effort to respond to every ticket within the required 2 working days but sometimes they just get behind. In addition, Emergency locates, and illegal Short Notice locates take time away from the scheduled work. If a utility company is routinely late, you can file a complaint with the appropriate Regulatory Agency or the One-Call Board of Texas.