



# IOWA ONE CALL<sup>SM</sup>

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### NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### FALL PROJECTS REQUIRE NOTIFICATION OF IOWA ONE CALL

Backyard landscaping and fall farm maintenance activities subject to rules of Iowa Law

October 9, 2006 (Des Moines, Iowa) – As climatologists debate the potential impact of El Niño on Iowa's weather for the 2006/2007 fall and winter season, Iowans are once again undertaking outdoor projects requiring digging or excavation. With backyard home improvements and landscaping projects as well as fall farming activities picking up, so is the need for increased awareness of Iowa One Call and Iowa Law requiring you to call before you dig.

Iowans need to notify Iowa One Call at 1-800-292-8989 at least 48 hours (excluding weekends and legal holidays) prior to digging or excavation. This call sets into motion a process resulting in the marking of underground facilities, commonly thought of as underground utility lines, with colored flags and paint markings, indicating where people should avoid digging.

Dan Van Weelden, Landscaping Designer with Country Landscapes, Inc. in Ames comments, "We see a lot of landscaping activity in the fall before winter sets in. Like other retailers around the state, we're selling trees for fall planting. Homeowners who do the planting themselves need to phone Iowa One Call and get their utilities marked first." The same applies to digging or excavation included with any home improvement projects such as setting footings for decks or post holes for fencing. "And once the locations are marked, people need to leave a no-dig area of at least eighteen inches on either side of the line created by the flags or paint markings," said Van Weelden. "Abiding by the law can avert a very dangerous situation such as puncturing a large gas line – or a financially devastating situation like severing a fiber optic line. Needless to say, there have been occasions where we've had to change planting locations to avoid underground lines – based on the markings. Iowa One Call is a valuable service and makes a real difference in safety."

On the farm, most Iowans think of fall as harvest time. "There's also potentially a lot more going on in the fall," points out Rich Fee who farms near Indianola and is Senior Crops and Soils Editor for *Successful Farming* magazine. He adds, "Farmers may be undertaking fall and early winter work that they think of as routine, yet goes dangerously deep into the soil. This activity could include tiling and deep ripping fields that are in corn and soybean rotations. Waterway projects and fence maintenance are two more. I think a lot of people may not realize the need to call (Iowa One Call) when they're working in fields they've been planting for years. I have fiber optic cable on one farm." Fee adds, "You definitely wouldn't want the liability for cutting that. Iowans need to understand the consequences."

## **DIG-IN CONSEQUENCES**

When a utility line gets hit, at minimum there's the inconvenience of service disruption. There is also the potential for serious injury or death, especially with respect to dig-ins on gas and electric lines. There are also substantial potential civil penalties that can range from \$1,000 to \$10,000 per violation, with a maximum of \$500,000 per incident. Ben Booth, Public Relations Coordinator for Iowa One Call, says, "The Iowa One Call system is an important damage prevention tool that can help reduce the serious hazards and liabilities associated with coming in contact with underground facilities. So there's every reason to call and no reason not to. Plus, the service is free to anyone who calls in for a 'locate'. That's why it is important to know the law."

## **UNDERSTANDING THE LAW**

Iowa code requires notification of Iowa One Call before any digging or excavation on a property whether on a farm or a home in a city or town. Another surprising fact for many is that excavation encompasses much more than pulling out the shovel, tiller or trencher. As defined by Iowa Law, excavation is an "operation in which a structure or earth, rock or other material in or on the ground is moved, removed, compressed, or otherwise displaced by means of any tools or equipment. This includes, but is not limited to, digging, drilling, driving, grading, scraping, trenching, tiling, tunneling, ditching and demolition of structures."

"The basics are the same whether you live in town or in a rural area," says Booth. "Whether you're going to plant a big, balled and burlapped tree in a backyard in Cedar Rapids or the farm yard outside Sioux Center, you need to call Iowa One Call before digging the hole."

A potential point of confusion relates to Iowa One Call requirements specific to farming. Iowa Code, Chapter 480 states that normal farming operations do not require prior notification. "Normal farming operations" refer to plowing, cultivating, planting and harvesting that are common to most farms and DO NOT penetrate the soil more than fifteen inches in depth. "The fifteen inch rule is an often overlooked or a misinterpreted requirement," adds Booth. "It applies only to farming operations and has nothing to do with excavations in general. Anything going deeper than fifteen inches during fieldwork is not 'normal farming operations' and requires contacting Iowa One Call. So for chisel plowing, sub soiling, ripping, tiling, terracing, fence post installation and waterway work, you need to make the call."

## **INCREASING CALLS IN 2006**

"With the arrival of fall, we'd expect an increase in calls," says Nancy Jensen, Call Center manager for Iowa One Call. "While spring is always the busiest season, activity picks up in fall, especially October, after the late summer months. Call Center volume is up for the year through August; however, in Iowa we still experience dig-ins. Everyone needs to think safety, make the call and then dig safely." Last year, the call center located in Davenport, handled nearly 418,000 calls for utility locates and coordinated nearly 2.3 million location requests with utilities.

Whichever forecast you're partial to right now – the warmer, drier El Niño effect or the colder, snowier Farmer's Almanac prediction for '06-'07, one thing's for certain, Iowans will be out working in their yards and their fields. And, anyone planning to dig needs to call Iowa One Call at 1-800-292-8989 at least 48 hours before they dig. It's the law.

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Editor's Note: The information in this news release is accurate per Iowa Law (Chapter 480, Iowa Code). Please use this exact language to prevent any misrepresentation of the law. Please call us if you have any questions regarding this law. Thank you.