

New Directions: The Path Forward

Everyone has a stake in preventing damage to underground facilities. The Common Ground Study is the first step toward building a true community, of people who share a commitment to protecting America's underground infrastructure. Be a part of this community. Get informed. Get involved. You can start by obtaining up to date information about our damage prevention activities at <http://ops.dot.gov/damage.htm>.

Finding Common Ground

The Common Ground study may be accessed on the World Wide Web at <http://ops.dot.gov/damage.htm>. Printed and bound copies are also available from the Department of Transportation's Office of Pipeline Safety.

Your comments and questions are invited.

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Common Ground

*A Study of One-Call Systems
and
Damage Prevention
Best Practices*



**Sponsored by the United States
Department of Transportation
as authorized by
the Transportation Equity Act
for the 21st Century**

Protecting Vital Underground Facilities

America's vast underground infrastructure provides essential energy, telecommunications and other services to communities across the country. Protecting this essential infrastructure is a top priority for the people who plan, install, operate, repair, and regulate underground facilities. It's a responsibility shared by facility designers, facility operators, excavators, regulators, and property owners. And it's important to everyone who relies on America's underground infrastructure for essential energy, communication, and transportation services.

This brochure introduces a valuable new resource for everyone concerned with protecting underground facilities: the Common Ground Study of One-Call Systems and Damage Prevention Best Practices. This study was undertaken by the damage prevention community and included the active participation of people with an interest in the many dimensions of underground damage prevention. The Office of Pipeline Safety of the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Research and Special Programs Administration acted as the study sponsor, as part of its commitment to assuring safe and liveable communities.

The Challenge

Ensuring safe excavation means knowing where underground facilities are, marking them appropriately -- and maintaining open communications from the planning phase of a project through its completion. Thus, everyone involved in excavation activities has a part to play in the damage prevention challenge. The Common Ground Study can help us work together to develop and maintain successful damage prevention programs, today and for the future

Background

In 1998, Congress directed the Department of Transportation to identify "best practices" for preventing damage to underground facilities, and for assuring their safe operation. To fulfill this mandate, as authorized by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), OPS undertook an unprecedented collaboration involving a broad spectrum of damage prevention stakeholders. This included more than 160 stakeholders who volunteered their time to represent multiple industries and interest groups.

For nearly a year, these experts -- representing multiple industries, community interests, and professional representatives -- worked in teams to identify, define and agree on more than 130 best practices, governing all aspects of damage prevention. The integrated report on this effort was delivered to the Secretary of Transportation on June 30, 1999 at a public meeting in Washington, DC, co-sponsored by the National Transportation Safety Board.

A Valuable New Resource

The Common Ground Study, now available both online and in hard copy form, presents -- for the first time -- a detailed and comprehensive look at the most effective methods to prevent damage to underground facilities.

Whether you are a facility operator or a homeowner, an excavation professional or a home improvement amateur, the Common Ground Study offers information you can use. Common Ground lets you learn from the experts: people who speak from hands-on experience in design engineering, excavation contract locating, facility operations, and regulatory compliance.

Written in plain English, Common Ground offers a wealth of practical guidance, ideas, and insights. It contains detailed discussions of best practices drawn from throughout the country, and represents every stage of the damage prevention life-cycle -- from planning and design, mapping, one-call center practices, locating and marking, and excavation, through public education and awareness, reporting and evaluation, and regulatory compliance.

These practices address key elements to successful damage prevention programs. For example, the Report addresses practices relating to: stakeholder communication while planning construction activities; accessibility of one-call centers; ensuring accurate locating and marking; ensuring safe digging throughout actual excavation; use of education and other reasonable methods to facilitate compliance; marketing strategies to enhance public education; and effective reporting and evaluation of damage prevention programs. These examples provide only a few of the issues addressed in the Common Ground Report. Concluding the report is a look at some emerging technologies, and expert commentary on future directions.