

Buried Utilities: Before the Next Bucket Moves

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Why this matters

The next bucket can move excavation from a marked estimate into a utility's actual location. A completed locate process does not clear that approach step or an unexpected service.

Objective: Verify the exact-location evidence and approach hold point before excavation advances.

Key hazards or failure points

Incomplete locate coverage; erased marks; unknown services; electric contact; gas or water release.

Practical controls

- Set an approach hold point in the approved excavation method. Use current owner information and applicable local requirements; resolve private or unidentified services.
- Use the approved safe method to establish exact locations when approaching estimated utilities. Follow applicable local requirements and utility-owner instructions.
- Protect or support exposed installations as required. Coordinate excavation, equipment movement and any service isolation with the responsible people.

Verify It in the Field

Before advancing, have the operator identify the hold point against the actual excavation and current utility information. Stop if marks or conditions conflict.

Have the excavation lead show the approved approach method and evidence establishing the actual utility location. Do not probe blindly or assume depth.

Confirm operators know the restricted area, stop signal and emergency contact. Verify required support before exposing more of an installation.

Stop and reassess

Stop affected excavation for missing marks, conflicting records, unknown lines or changed limits. For contact or suspected damage, follow the utility emergency plan and summon help from safety.

Ask the crew

1. Which services might the ticket exclude?
2. How will exact location be established?
3. What change requires a new locate review?

Use this HOP tool — Validate assumptions: Name one statement about the buried service that rests on an assumption. Identify the record or authorized safe locating activity needed to resolve it. Assign an owner and hold the affected excavation until the finding is recorded and explained to the operator.

Sources: 1926.651(b). HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/buried-utilities-approach-hold-point