

Keeping Gardeners Safe

by Melinda Myers

Call 811 before you dig is a message worth repeating. Thanks to April being Safe Digging Month, 811 Day (August 11th), and efforts by you and others we are seeing greater awareness. The 2021 Common Ground Alliance Public Awareness Research Study found 74% of people doing projects that involved digging were aware of this free service. Almost 50% of them contacted 811 or their local underground utility locating service before placing the first shovel in the ground. This is an improvement but still leaves more opportunities for us to make people aware of the service and encourage them to take this important step when their projects involve digging.

Let's work together to continue to remind anyone in Wisconsin digging with a shovel, posthole digger or anything else (including hand tools) that disturbs the soil that they are required to contact Diggers Hotline. They can do so by dialing 811 or filing online at www.DiggersHotline.com. This is a free service that helps protect Wisconsin residents from injury and repair costs that may occur if they strike or damage a buried utility line.

As you chat with fellow gardeners about this free service, questions are sure to arise. Here are a few I often receive and you are likely to encounter:

Yes, they must contact Diggers Hotline no matter how deep they need to dig. This is not just for projects that involve large equipment and deep holes. This is important because the depth of utility lines can vary. Erosion, soil settling, previous projects, and uneven surfaces are a few of the reasons the utility depth can vary. This means there is still a risk of striking an underground utility even when digging just a few inches.

Use hand tools when digging within 18" on either side of any marked underground utility. This state law mandate is meant to keep you safe since utility locating is not an exact science. The 18" buffer zone reduces the risk of damage that is more likely to occur when using mechanized equipment close to the marks.

Remind them that private lines from things like propane lines, sewer laterals, landscape lighting or irrigation that are contained within their property will not be marked. A locating company can be hired to mark private lines. Click [here](#) to find a company near you.

Thanks for your help with this important step in helping reduce the risk of injury and the cost to repair damage when someone fails to call 811 or file online with Diggers Hotline.

It is always best to ask who will contact Diggers Hotline when hiring a professional to work on your property. The professional is the one required by law to contact Diggers Hotline, and it's best to confirm that they will before they begin work.

A three-business day advance notice is required and once the utility locate request is made with Diggers Hotline, they will receive a list of the utility facility owners and their phone numbers.

A three-working day advance notice is required to give utility company representatives time to arrive at the digging location so that they can mark the location of their underground lines. They will use paint or flags to indicate the approximate location of those lines. Your locate request from Diggers Hotline will have your project's start date and time. Make sure that you don't begin digging until that start date and time.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including [The Midwest Gardener's Handbook](#) and [Small Space Gardening](#). She hosts The Great Courses ["How to Grow Anything"](#) instant video and

[DVD series](#) and the nationally-syndicated [Melinda's Garden Moment](#) TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.