

Ontario's One Call system needs more enforcement

TORONTO (Marketwired: March 24, 2015) – Excessively late responses to locate requests, often taking weeks or months instead of the legislated mandatory five days, are hindering work on vital infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer systems. Without stricter enforcement, these delays will slow down delivery of these important services, says a new report from the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

DEFINITION: A locate is a response to a request by an operator of buried infrastructure that consists of both surface markings (such as paint marks, signs or flags) and a drawing showing the location of specific buried infrastructure such as natural gas distribution pipes, buried fibre-optic cables or sanitary sewers.



A worker sprays a lawn to mark the location of buried infrastructure.

RCCAO Executive Director Andy Manahan says that “We have been hearing from contractors that it’s been very difficult to get timely locates from all utilities. This slows down projects and adds to the cost of many infrastructure and construction projects.”

More than 1,000 complaints have been filed about late or inaccurate locates since mid-2014 with Ontario One Call, the provincial authority that handles requests for and responds to utility

locates, writes lawyer Frank Zechner, author of the new RCCAO report “Improving Ontario’s One Call System.” As there is no record of even a single conviction laid under the *Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification Act*, there has been no incentive to meet the mandated five-day requirement for responding to locate requests.

So, how does this affect contractors? “These locate request delays can lead to downtime costs of \$10,000 or more per day per crew,” Zechner says. “It can also trigger delay penalties against the contractor by the municipality or other owner.”

And how does this affect the public?

According to Zechner, “Delays in locate requests can hold up the re-opening of roads, as well as the delivery of infrastructure, such as water or sewer service. These are real roadblocks to people’s everyday lives. That’s why we’re calling for more enforcement and other improvements.

“Many infrastructure owners are responsible and routinely respond to locate requests within the time limits, but if a project does not receive timely responses from each and every potentially affected utility, construction excavation cannot even start.”

RCCAO, a consortium of management and labour groups in the construction industry, commissioned this report looking at how 10 jurisdictions in the U.S. handle this process, including California, Illinois and Massachusetts. Processes in the U.S. have evolved over a longer period of time than in Ontario, and generally work much more effectively.

Many of those U.S. states have a single enforcement authority for all utility locate laws. Ontario has four separate laws governed by four separate authorities.

The full report is available at www.rccao.com.

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Contact Information

- **To arrange an interview, contact:**
Aonghus Kealy
Director of Communications, RCCAO
W: 905-760-7777, x. 111
C: 647-530-4855
kealy@rccao.com