

## Residential and civil contractors proposing six-point plan to speed up utility locates in Ontario

Vaughan, Ontario, Sept. 14, 2020 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- The [Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario \(RCCAO\)](#) and its stakeholders are calling on the province to speed-up utility locate responses in Ontario.

A [brief](#) outlining six measures to improve the Ontario One Call system was sent recently to the offices of Premier Doug Ford and to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, as well as 19 MPPs who are on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

“Contractors across the province are trying to catch-up with the backlog caused by COVID-19 and this heightened activity has resulted in an increase in demand for utility locates in many municipalities,” says RCCAO executive director Andy Manahan. “But this has been a chronic issue as contractors have complained for years that there are long delays for utilities such as gas companies and telecommunications firms to provide markings of where their underground services are located. In fact, a [recent article in Ear to the Ground](#) estimated that 85 per cent of all locate requests are late.”

The brief, called *Late Utility Locates: Ontario Construction Industry’s Priority Solutions*, notes that most jurisdictions have a deadline of three days to respond to locate requests, but Ontario has a legislated deadline of five business days. Over the years, the delivery of locates has been persistently late, with responses up to several weeks after the deadline has passed.

The One Call system is mandatory through the [Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012](#) (the “*One Call Act*”). To minimize the risk of severing a natural gas line, a water main and other underground infrastructure, it allows homeowners, construction contractors and other excavators to make one locate request to a call centre instead of separate calls to each utility.

The brief states that governments recognize that delivering infrastructure projects is important to an economic recovery, but contractors are still facing long delays waiting for utilities to provide locates. For larger projects where there are up to 10 different companies responding to a request, some of the locates expire by the time all the locates are received, necessitating a frustrating relocate request process.

The brief recommends that:

- The province restructure the board of directors of Ontario One Call so that half of the 12 members are non-utility representatives such as excavators, municipalities and the provincial government. Presently, nine of the board members represent utility members. Concerns have been expressed that directors representing utilities are unwilling to

prosecute fellow utilities. As the Ontario One Call board is dominated by utility company representatives, there is no incentive for these companies to levy fines against themselves for not following the legislated timelines.

- Stakeholders and Ontario One Call work together to maximize the sharing of locate responses among contractors and subcontractors working on the same construction site. Currently, multiple contractors bidding or working on a common construction project must each request their own locates.
- All utilities, not just gas distributors, be encouraged to maximize the validity period of their locate tickets without impairing the health and safety of workers and the public. Longer locate ticket validity periods will reduce the number of locate requests and likely the number and/or severity of late locates.
- Locate service providers be prequalified to locate all utilities in order to prevent companies from contracting their locates to a single company. The existing model creates artificial market scarcity by limiting a particular utility locate to a single company over a wide geographic area.
- One Call and utilities be required to differentiate between single-address and multi-address locates. By modifying the reporting and record-keeping process, One Call could more easily identify problem areas related to the late delivery of locates and focus enforcement efforts.
- Eliminate the need for further locates once a stationary vertical excavation has been dug below the depth of the lowest buried utility. This will lessen the burden on locate services and free up additional system capacity.

“Ontario needs significant improvement in response times for the delivery of utility markings, especially if we are depending on construction to be a leading sector in our recovery efforts,” says Manahan. “Implementing our six-point plan will reduce locate wait times for contractors and have a substantial and positive impact on helping them deliver timely and cost-effective construction services.”

RCCAO issued a [report in 2015](#) urging the provincial government to take action, but nothing was done. A major focus of the report was on the enforcement regime used in other jurisdictions so that there is greater compliance with the legislated timelines. RCCAO is also a member of the Ontario Regional Common Ground Alliance.