

Abandoned Lines Discussion Group
Thursday, March 12, 2020 12:30pm

Participants on the conference call: Lori Wade, Scott Lucas, Clayton Heinz, Joe Igel, Alice Miller, Jeff Kursman

Alice summarized the results of the abandoned line surveys conducted by OHIO811. The results (a Survey Monkey dashboard) for the facility owner and excavator survey were sent to the Abandoned Lines DG Members on March 5th in preparation of the March 12 call.

In short, survey results show: 77% of facility owners responding were municipalities, 23% are from a private entity; of those responding 36% can identify their abandoned lines while 64% cannot. A wide range of procedures are used when abandoning a line; cut and cap; formal filing to abandon a line, the abandonment process, and then the facility ownership is transferred to the land owner, etc. 85% of facility owners said while there is no risk in removing their lines, they leave them in place.

When facility owners were asked what their procedure is when an excavator contacts them about an abandoned line – the follow-up procedures were varied to say the least. Not surprising, when excavators were asked in their survey what steps they take when encountering an abandoned line – their procedures were just as varied.

When asked what information is captured about an abandoned line by the owner they cited the following in varying degrees: Type of facility, material of facility, material within the facility, was the facility purged, 73% of respondents said the location of the facility was captured. GIS used to identify location = 35%.

For more information members may follow the links and refer to the survey dashboards sent to them on March 5th.

Moving forward the discussion group may want to look at the verbiage currently in the ORC, specifically 3781.25 (B) “Underground utility facility” includes any item buried or placed below ground or submerged under water for use in connection with the storage or conveyance of water or sewage; electronic, telephonic, or telegraphic communications; television signals; electricity; crude oil; petroleum products; artificial or liquefied petroleum; manufactured, mixed, or natural gas; synthetic or liquefied natural gas; propane gas; coal; steam; hot water; or other substances. **“Underground utility facility” includes all operational underground pipes, sewers, tubing, conduits, cables, valves, lines, wires, worker access holes, and attachments, owned by any person, firm, or company.** “Underground utility facility” does not include a private septic system in a one-family or multi-family dwelling utilized only for that dwelling and not connected to any other system.

In addition to the verbiage noted above facility owners further designate lines as being operational in use, operational not in use, idle, inactive, active, etc., and abandoned. Perhaps a more specific definition is needed for some of these terms: Abandoned; operational, etc.

Other question: Should a utility simply be able to abandon their facilities and walk away from all responsibilities. Related issues include taxation, inability to regulate third party utilization of pipes as conduit or avoid easement permits. Who takes ownership?

Key points to bring to OUDPC:

3781.25B specifies that the law “includes all operational pipelines.” Does a section need to be added, clarifying the definition of “operational?” A facility may be idle/ not in current use, but still be operational, versus a defunct and/or abandoned facility. Are utilities consistent in their definitions and labels?

Identifying all previously abandoned lines and last ownership would be impossible. Many facilities don't/no longer have the ability to be identified using common locating methods. Technology are advancing in ground penetrating radar, etc., but a more practical focus is forward looking.

What information could be collected and provided moving forward?

Should a moving forward date be established?

Could there be a central repository of mapping be established for future abandoned lines? Could OHIO811 serve as this repository given that the center maintains mapping, but not specific locations? How much data would this entail? How would liability be addressed?

What standards and best practices should be enacted for the process of abandoning facilities? In addition to proper purging of gas and pressurized fluids, there are other potential dangers associated with asbestos lining, PCBs and other chemicals.

Key point of agreement was that utilities should be prohibited from utilizing abandoned pipes as conduit for operational facilities due to inherent dangers.

Jeff Kursman and Alice Miller
3/20/2020