

Community Commemorates 40th Anniversary of Mill Woods Incident

Event focuses on partnerships that protect underground infrastructure and public safety

March 2, 2019 Edmonton, AB– Local historians, municipal government, safety advocates and the capital region’s underground infrastructure operators marked the 40th anniversary of one of the largest peacetime civic evacuations on record at the Mill Woods Public Library this Saturday.

On March 2, 1979, first responders safely shepherded 19,000 Mill Woods residents from their homes following the rupture of an underground propane pipeline and subsequent fire that burned for 16 hours. The incident lasted for two days and was later attributed to an accidental and unreported contact with a propane pipeline.

“This unprecedented chain of events was certainly a defining moment for our city,” explains Former Mayor Cecil Purves. “Not only did it bring people together, it was the catalyst for positive changes that have helped to protect our community going forward.”

The historic incident transformed the way we collectively approach digging practices with the often forgotten infrastructure underfoot. In the months following this incident, the [Edmonton Area Pipeline & Utility Operators’ Committee \(EAPUOC\)](#) was formed in an effort to enhance communication and promote best practices for digging around buried pipelines, utilities and cables.

“Indeed the distance travelled over the last four decades is remarkable,” says Lee Fisher, Vice Chair of EAPUOC. “If there is a silver lining from that fateful day so many years ago it is the impetus to bring together operators, contractors, and residents to protect the critical infrastructure that is beneath our feet and provides the essential services we use every day.”

In 1984 the safety landscape further evolved with the establishment of a province wide one-call utility locate request and notification system. “[Alberta One Call](#)’s message is simple – whether you are a homeowner or contractor, you need to *know what’s below*” explains Mike Sullivan, President Alberta One-Call. “Always Click Before You Dig. It only takes a few minutes to protect you, your family and your community.”

Today, these stakeholder groups continue working to ensure the safety and wellbeing of contractors and community members. In addition to education and awareness, there is also growing pressure for provincial damage prevention legislation.

“We know for a fact that locate requests improve outcomes,” says Michelle Tetreault, Executive Director of the [Alberta Common Ground Alliance \(ACGA\)](#). “This isn’t just about inconvenient service interruptions or the yearly \$350 million price tag attached to damaged underground infrastructure; our hope is to improve safety across the board by addressing the need for a mandated comprehensive click-before-you-dig notification system in Alberta.”

Last year, [Bill 211](#), the *Alberta Underground Infrastructure Notification System Consultation Act* was introduced in the Alberta Legislature. The proposed provincial legislation would make it mandatory for anyone digging near utilities to place a locate request before undertaking any excavation to identify underground infrastructure, and for buried utility owners to register their assets with Alberta One Call Corporation.

As part of the commemoration event, the City of Edmonton's Mayor Don Iveson proclaimed March 2 as *Underground Infrastructure Awareness Day* to serve as a reminder of the important infrastructure underneath our city that provides many of the utilities and services to our citizens.

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About [EAPUOC](#)

EAPUOC is a not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder organization that includes 40 member companies, municipalities and agencies who are committed to community safety and awareness. We promote best practices around buried pipelines and utilities and cables, and act as a communications network during emergencies, in the Capital Region.

About the [ABCGA](#)

The Alberta Common Ground Alliance is a not-for-profit multi-stakeholder organization dedicated to improving worker safety, public safety and protecting the environment by adopting effective ground disturbance and damage prevention practices and advocating for damage prevention legislation.

About [Alberta One-Call](#)

Alberta One-Call is a private, not-for-profit corporation providing a communications service between people who intend to disturb the ground and the utility operators who register their buried facilities (Members of Alberta One-Call).

For media inquiries, please contact:

Alana Yim

P: 780-498-0870

E: alana@woodbridgecommunications.ca