

The ORCGA Damage Prevention Training Program (DPT) Resurfaces

The COVID-19 Pandemic has taken its toll not only on the businesses of our members, but also the ORCGA's capability to deliver its' Education Programs. The DPT Program was in full swing right up until March 13th. Then, the COVID-19 Pandemic set in and businesses were either forced to have their employees work from home or shut down completely. The Pandemic also forced the ORCGA to put the DPT Program on hold.

Businesses were required to adjust and develop new operating models in order to survive the Pandemic. The expansion of virtual meetings using platforms including Zoom, MS Teams or GoToMeetings became the norm with organizations and associations.

The ORCGA Education and Training Committee was no different. At the first virtual meeting, it was determined that a "virtual" DPT Program should be investigated since the construction industry, an "Essential Service" would continue, including the need to Call or Click Before You Dig and obtain locates prior to excavation. The need for Locator Training would need to be delivered in some way or form. The Committee instructed the ORCGA to investigate virtual or on-line options for delivery of the DPT Program.

The ORCGA began discussions with a Training Development firm to assess the scope, feasibility and cost associated with developing an online version. Further clarification and the details required for running the DPT Program were discussed at length with the DPT Instructors.

The most significant finding was that the DPT Programs (both 100 and 200) were heavily weighted on "practical" components where the students would go outside of the classroom to observe and practice various locating exercises, including trouble shooting, etc. Although there are currently over 900 PowerPoint slides in the program deck, this makes up only 50% of the course.

Nevertheless, the course material was provided to the training development firm, where they evaluated options to convert the program into an e-learning format. Their estimated costs to develop the program were substantially higher than expected and would require substantial development time. And this only covered 50% of the course material, and the practical being the balance, which would require in-person instruction. In addition, the final written examination would need to be in-person as well.

The DPT Instructors reconvened to discuss how this initiative should proceed and determined that even if a virtual program was developed and implemented, there would still remain a constraint on the number of students that could be instructed on the practical aspects of the course at any one time since the enforcement of social distancing is critical.

The instructors agreed that the maximum class size would be 5-8 with an absolute maximum of no more than 10 students. From here it was determined that in the immediate term, the social distancing protocol of 6' of spacing between students could readily be achieved using a classroom normally sized for 25 or 30.

In recent years, the DPT Program has changed with the needs of the ORCGA membership. Often, requests are made to run smaller DPT courses for individual companies with 5-8

students. This change in course offering has seen excellent uptake by our members, as it removes the previous requirement of minimum class sizes of around 20 students, and, in addition, running the courses where the members are located vs. a harder-to-reach centralized location.

This realization and learning opened the possibility of resuming the DPT Program, with the only change being “maximum” class sizes versus “minimum” class sizes. The other challenge is the demand for the instructors who would need to run an increased number of programs for what would have been a single course.

To test whether this would be viable to the membership, a request for training 24 students at one of our excavator members in August will be used. The course would have previously been run as 1 course, 5 days and one instructor. Discussions with the member along with the complications presented by the Pandemic resulted in an agreement to run 3 – 8 person classes of the course over a three week period. This also requires triple the number of instructors in the same timeframe.

Based on the success with this excavator member, the ORCGA has been working with the previously cancelled program, that was to have run in April, using a similar format. Since this time, the ORCGA has received individual requests for training moving into Fall 2020.

The ORCGA will now be offering and organizing DPT Training for its members using the new smaller class format and will also post tentative dates and locations on the website based on demand and location. All course information will be communicated here:

<https://orcga.com/damage-prevention-training/training-dates/>

Inquiries and training requests can be made through Kim Sheppard, ORCGA Manager Administration & Training (Kim@orcga.com).

The ORCGA looks forward to resuming the Damage Prevention Technician course and educating students to achieve competence in locating buried utility services.