

Farmers: maximize yields by digging safe

Each year, EPCOR Natural Gas responds to several emergency hits on natural gas lines on local farms. These incidents can result in significant property damage or injury.

As a landowner, you have the right to dig on your property but just sinking a shovel into the ground could cause a disruption for which you could be held liable. While natural gas lines are typically buried at a minimum 18 inches, excavating even just 12 inches below the surface can result in a line being struck.

As you harvest this month and prepare your fields for the season ahead, remember: before you dig, you must have all buried utilities located. This process begins by calling Ontario One Call.

Why you need to Dig Safe

Any work that disturbs the ground could result in serious injury, widespread service disruption and costly repairs. These significant consequences could be avoided.

- **Prevent injury or death:** injuries affect the physical and emotional wellbeing of you, your family and your employees. They can also result in delays to production or have legal ramifications.
- **Save money:** under Ontario regulations, you are responsible for the cost of repairs if you hit a natural gas line. You may also be required to pay a fine or costs associated with an investigation. These costs could add up to thousands of dollars.
- **Avoid disruption:** your operations could be halted as the gas line is repaired, preventing you from maximizing your productivity. The disruptions can also affect neighbouring homes and businesses.

Signs you may have struck a line

Knowing when you've hit a natural gas line can help reduce the risks to both people and property. Look for the following signs:

- **Smell it:** in its pure state, natural gas has no smell or taste. As a safety precaution, a scent called methyl mercaptan is added to natural gas before it is delivered to your home. This odour smells like rotten eggs or sulphur so that natural gas can be detected.
- **See it:** natural gas is odourless and colourless but it can leave behind visible signs including patches of dead vegetation, blowing dust from holes in the ground, bubbles in wet or flooded areas or even flames. In some cases, spotting vapours or ground frosting can suggest a line has been hit.
- **Hear it:** a hissing or roaring noise coming from the ground could also indicate you've hit a line.

What to do if you hit a line

If you suspect you've struck a line, call your natural gas provider or 911 right away. This requires immediate attention. Be sure to keep clear of the area, turn off any machinery or motor vehicles, don't smoke or use anything that could spark a flame.

Who to call before you dig

Striking a natural gas line is preventable. Before starting any type of excavation, you must contact Ontario One Call to have the underground utilities located. At no cost to you, they will notify EPCOR or your local provider. The utility will provide locates for all areas in advance of the meter without charge. If the area where you are excavating is after the meter, you may be required to contract a private locating contractor.

Your natural gas provider is a great resource for information. They can provide you with helpful contact cards or educational brochures or conduct an on-site inspection. As part of our service, EPCOR conducts annual visits to customers who have large factored meters that provide higher pressure to dryers, kilns or poultry operations.

At EPCOR, safety is our top priority—for our employees and our customers. Whether you're beginning your harvest, planting crops or doing repairs, be sure to phone Ontario One Call at 1-800-400-2255 or visit www.digsafe.ca before you dig to keep everyone safe and the farm running at full production.

EPCOR is a Canadian-based company that provides clean water, wastewater and drainage services and safe, reliable electricity and natural gas to more than one million residential and commercial customers in North America.