

## **Toronto Hydro Taking New Approach to Preventing Underground Electrical Cable Strikes**

In a city the size of Toronto, underground cable strikes can have a serious impact on residential customers, along with businesses and public transit. Each time there's an incident, there's a risk to public safety, potential for large-scale power outages and costly damages.

To help reduce the risk of underground hits, Toronto Hydro's Damage Prevention Team recently began working with their Public Relations Department. The goal is to improve communications with industry partners, contractors and the municipality.

Previously, Toronto Hydro's communications efforts focused on homeowners and the general public using the message "Call before you Dig." Tactics included outreach to the media, social media postings and brochures handed out at community events. But when looking closely at data and statistics regarding dig-ins, it became clear that the public were responsible for a very small number of hits.

Claims information showed that between 2010 and 2017, the highest number of claims related to homeowners was four in one year. In some years, the number was zero. All other claims were related to contractors using heavy machinery.

Other data – captured through the Damage Information Reporting Tool and internal investigations – provided even more insights into the causes of dig-ins. What was found is that excavators are involved in a large number of incidents with the top three causes in 2017 being:

- Excavator failed to maintain clearance after verifying marks
- Excavator dug prior to verifying marks by test-hole
- General improper excavator practices

It's no surprise a dig-in is most likely to occur when heavy machinery is involved, but having the data to back-up this assumption is crucial when making a strategy change. While messaging aimed at homeowners has not ceased, it's no longer the main focus for Toronto Hydro. Working with the Ontario Regional Common Ground Alliance, the utility is now leveraging industry channels to reach out to contractors. This also includes internal contractors who are hired to work on behalf of Toronto Hydro.

With this renewed strategy, Toronto Hydro is aiming to help reduce the number of hits and also improve safety and reduce costs to the system.