

# Between the Lines



**MAY 2020**

## HOW TO AVOID DELAYS

As everyone works together to face the difficult challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, our not-for-profit organization remains open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Contractors can use our [online E-Request entry page](#) anytime to submit a free locate request with no training required. State law requires that you provide at least two business days' notice.

Our call center is staffed with agents to receive and process locate requests, but longer-than-usual hold times may occur, especially during peak times. If you still choose to call in a locate request during this busy time, it is important to be prepared with the [proper information](#) and remember that we are always open, day or night. [Avoid potential delays, enter an online request.](#)

[Enter an E-Request](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Remote Ticket Entry (RTE)

#### Webinars

May 6, 13, 20 and 27

No cost

[Register and learn more](#)

### Virtual Toolbox Talks

May 7, 14, 21 and 28

[Register or learn more](#)

### Memorial Day

May 25

JULIE Holiday

[Learn more.](#)

Utility members are still required to respond to all locate requests received within the time explicitly specified by state law. We encourage you to only submit tickets that you fully intend to excavate on within the next 2-14 days. Additionally, please confirm that ALL member utilities listed on your locate requests have been marked before beginning excavation. One of the benefits of our [self-service options](#) is the ability to print your locate request ticket.

Another popular self-service option for contractors is [Remote Ticket Entry \(RTE\)](#). When recently asked about their experiences using this program, contractors scheduling their projects from home and on the job site highlighted the benefits, including no on hold time waiting for a call center agent, 24/7 access to the full ticket with map, the helpful "lookup" feature and ease of use. Webinar sessions typically last one hour, after which attendees can start using the online program right way. [Register for an upcoming no cost RTE Webinar](#) or contact our RTE Support Group at 815-741-5011.

## LOCATING DURING THE PANDEMIC

During a recent [Virtual Toolbox Talk](#), Damage Prevention Manager Dave Van Wy talked with Contract Locator USIC's Gerald Johnson, Operations Manager for Illinois, about how the COVID-19 Pandemic is impacting the utility locating industry. Johnson stressed that USIC has implemented social distancing measures to protect their employees and customers equipping staff with masks, protective eye wear and sanitizers. USIC is maintaining their work force and continuing to train new staff while taking precautions such as online training and smaller field class sizes of up to 5 to allow for the 6-foot distancing. "It has impacted how we train, but has not prevented us from training," Johnson said. Taking into account the volume volatility of 2019 in numerous counties, USIC started 2020 with 100 more locators than last year throughout the state.



As far as the impact on the volume of work, Johnson noted that Illinois is a “tale of two states.” Northern Illinois saw a drop of up to 20% when the stay-at-home order first went into place; although, volumes have increased since, narrowing the impact. Southern Illinois has experienced almost no drop in locate requests. Utility work is considered essential according to Governor Pritzker’s Executive Order, so most of this work has continued. Based on work projections and discussions with their clients, Johnson expects to close the gap on current workload as compared to previous years as we move into late spring.

Johnson said there are two schools of thought on what will happen within the utility locating industry once the stay-at-home orders are lifted. The first thought being as pandemic orders are lifted, work which was not capable of being completed up to this point will push out current or pending projects to later dates. This would have little impact to the seasonal trends already being realized. The second thought is work having been postponed would be stacked up on top of the current excavation projects already underway in the field. In speaking with their utility partners and numerous contractors, Johnson stated this has not yet shown to be the case, but they welcome feedback on significant project work which has been postponed.

Johnson and Van Wy offered these suggestions to help control the volume of work:

- Make sure all effected utilities are aware of large projects. Consider using the [Joint Meet](#) process.
- [Pre-mark](#) the dig area. Using white paint or flags to indicate the planned excavation can mean the difference in a locator spending two days locating right-of-way to right-of-way versus two hours marking where digging will actually occur.
- Consider giving more than 48 hours’ notice for a locate request, especially for larger projects.
- Communication is critical. Make sure the person listed on a locate ticket is someone within your organization that is knowledgeable about the work being done.

You can hear the complete interview with Johnson and Van Wy by [clicking here](#). To learn more or register for an upcoming no-cost Virtual Toolbox Talk, [go to our website](#).