
California Underground Facilities Safe Excavation Board

April 13, 2026

Agenda Item No. 14 (Information Item) – Staff Report

Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach Awareness Campaign Update

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SUMMARY

National data shows that a consistent public safety concern for the excavation industry is when 811 is not contacted prior to digging. Through public engagement opportunities, the Board identified that stakeholders in California are aligned on the need to coordinate efforts that address this behavioral factor across diverse audiences. In response, the Board is developing a Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach Awareness Campaign (Awareness Campaign).

This report summarizes the Board’s ongoing work for this campaign, including analytical research to identify current and emerging risks associated with underground utility damage in California, and industry research to determine how to reach the right people at the right time with the right message.

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020 Strategic Plan Objective: Improve Compliance by Reaching Parties in Effective Ways

Strategic Activity: Establish a Framework for Coordinated State Education and Outreach

BACKGROUND

Government Code section [4216.12\(b\)\(1\)](#) requires the Board to coordinate education and outreach activities that encourage safe excavation practices.

At the Board’s 2023 Education and Outreach meeting¹, a workshop was held to explore ways to better coordinate statewide outreach efforts among stakeholders. Building on this, the [2024 Workplan](#) included interviews with industry stakeholders to evaluate existing education programs and their effectiveness. Findings presented at the 2024 Annual Education and Outreach Meeting² led to a recommendation for additional workshops to better understand

¹ [Notice and Agenda](#) for the September 11, 2023, Annual Education and Outreach Meeting

² September 4, 2024, Annual Education and Outreach Meeting, [Item 8: Framework for Coordinated State Education and Outreach](#)

education challenges in underground damage prevention.

The Board's Education and Outreach committee (E&O committee) facilitated public workshops in 2025 for stakeholders to collaborate on statewide solutions for education and training issues. Findings from these workshops were presented at the Board's November 2025 meeting³, and included that "Failure to Notify 811" was identified as a key cause of underground infrastructure damage and that stakeholder discussions highlighted a lack of awareness across the excavation industry regarding responsibilities under the Dig Safe Act.

Also at the November 2025 meeting, the Board approved the [2026-2027 Workplan](#), which includes implementation of a statewide Awareness Campaign. The project plan for the Awareness Campaign⁴ was presented at the February 2026 Board meeting.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Common Ground Alliance (CGA) DIRT Report⁵ data consistently identifies "failure to notify the 811 center" as the largest individual root cause of damages nationally. The Board has heard feedback from stakeholders that demonstrates their alignment on the need to address this public safety issue with a coordinated statewide effort.

The E&O unit is currently focused on the first phase of a statewide public safety Awareness Campaign implementation plan: Development.

Development

The development phase for the Awareness Campaign includes planning and research, drafting key messages, and determining target audiences.

The Board created an Education Course with curriculum designed to empower individuals to be safety advocates for themselves and others; the Awareness Campaign will use that same foundational approach to motivate safety-first mindsets and behavioral changes. The campaign content will have common themes intended to leave strong impressions while answering these questions for the audience:

- What happens when safe excavation practices aren't followed?
- Why should I care whether someone is following safe digging practices or not?
- How can I protect myself, my co-workers, and my community from the dangers of unsafe digging?

Planning and Research

In addition to analyzing statewide damage data, research is being done to gain a deeper understanding of some of the issues that stakeholders have brought to the E&O Committee.

³ November 17-18, 2025 Underground Safety Board Meeting; [Item 42 – Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach Workshops Update](#)

⁴ February 9-10, 2026 Underground Safety Board Meeting; [Item 19 - Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach Awareness Campaign](#)

⁵ Common Ground Alliance [DIRT Report & Analysis](#)

'Invisible' Risks

During the workshops held in 2025, the E&O Committee heard from stakeholders that one of the reasons that people don't call 811 is because they can't see underground infrastructure. In a sense, they forget it is there; an "out of sight, out of mind" situation.

To frame how to address this issue with campaign content, research is being done to learn more about the network of underground installations that exist in California and how residents rely on that infrastructure throughout their daily lives, including:

- Electricity
- Natural gas
- Petroleum products
- Potable and non-potable water
- Waste disposal
- Telecommunications
- Cable television
- High-speed internet

Research has also provided insight into the extensive underground installations that exist in California:

- More than: 150,000 miles of natural gas pipeline⁶
- California's natural gas utilities provide service to over 11 million gas meters⁷
- Over one million water service connections.⁸
- Extensive sewer infrastructure. Total data isn't available, but the number is quite large, for example, San Francisco has over 1,000 miles of sewer main in a City/County comprised of about 50 square miles.⁹
- Approximately 33 percent of the 220,590 miles of electrical distribution lines across the state are underground.¹⁰
- Construction is ongoing for about 2,700 miles of a planned 8,000-mile broadband expansion.¹¹

This data will be considered when creating educational campaign materials and will help tell the story that even though underground infrastructure is not as visible as other infrastructure, damage to any of these installations can have wide-reaching impacts and can endanger lives.

Emerging Risks

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) have been growing in popularity in California; in 2023, ADUs

⁶ [Southern California Gas Company—Pipeline Basics](#); [PG&E—Gas Systems](#)

⁷ CPUC—[Natural Gas and California](#)

⁸ [California Natural Resources Agency Open Data](#)—Drinking Water - Public Water System Annually Reported Number of Service Connections Metered and Unmetered by Service Connection Type - Service Connections - Reporting Years 2013-2023

⁹ KQED—[Tunnels Under San Francisco? Inside the Dark, Dangerous World of the Sewers](#)

¹⁰ CPUC—[Undergrounding Programs Description](#)

¹¹ [Governor of California](#)—California on track to surpass 3,000 miles of broadband construction by end of year with new infrastructure agreements signed

comprised more than 21 percent of all homes permitted statewide.¹² ADUs might be a new, detached structure added to a house, or an addition or conversion to an existing home.

No matter the type, this trend is resulting in an increase in construction. Between 2016-2023, the number of ADUs permitted annually in the state grew from 1,336 to 30,349 a more than 20-fold increase.¹³

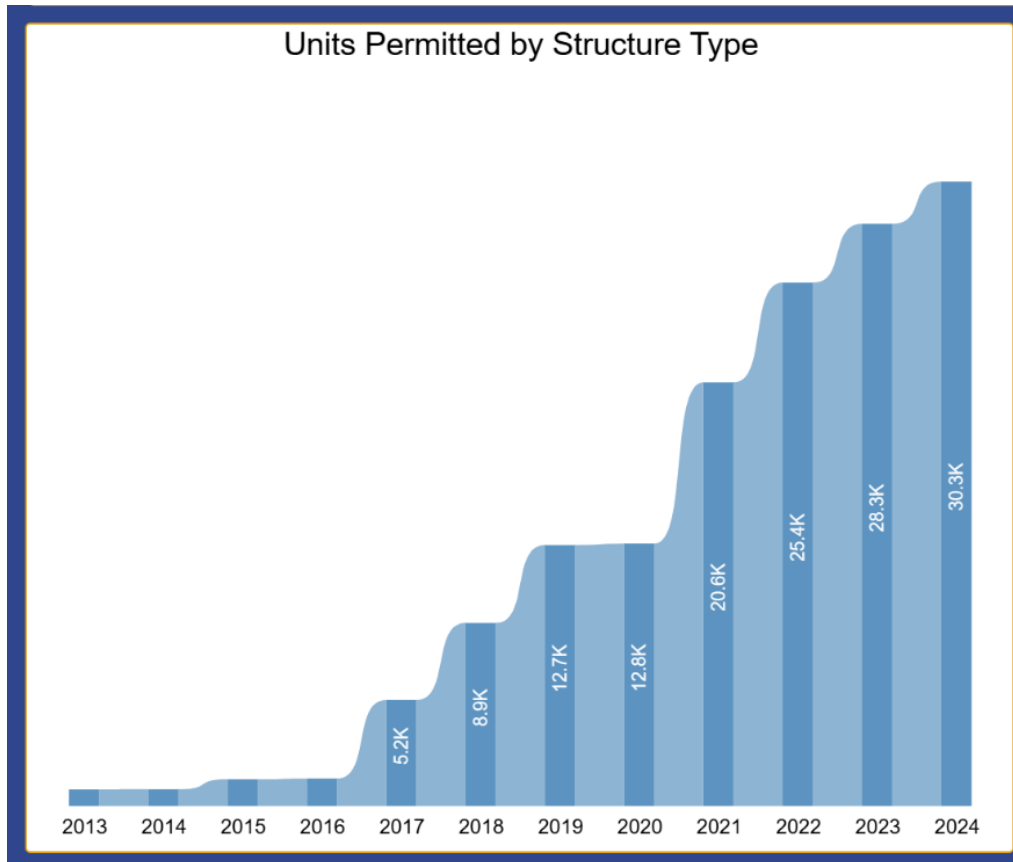


Figure 1 HCD Housing Element Implementation and APR Dashboard showing ADUs permitted in CA from 2013-2024

Data from 2024 that details ADU permits issued by jurisdiction¹⁴ show that the following areas have the highest related activity:

- Los Angeles
- San Diego
- Long Beach

¹² California Department of Housing and Community Development [Accessory Dwelling Unit Handbook](#), January 2025, page 4.

¹³ California Department of Housing and Community Development, [Annual Progress Reports - Data Dashboard and Downloads](#), Housing Element Implementation and APR Dashboard; Dashboard filtered to Construction > Structures > Structure Type = Accessory Dwelling Unit for all counties, jurisdictions, years, and COG/Regions.

¹⁴ California Department of Housing and Community Development, [Annual Progress Reports - Data Dashboard and Downloads](#), Housing Element Implementation and APR Dashboard; Dashboard filtered to Construction > Structures > Structure Type = Accessory Dwelling Unit > Year = 2024 for all counties, jurisdictions, and COG/Regions.

- San Jose
- Santa Maria
- Garden Grove

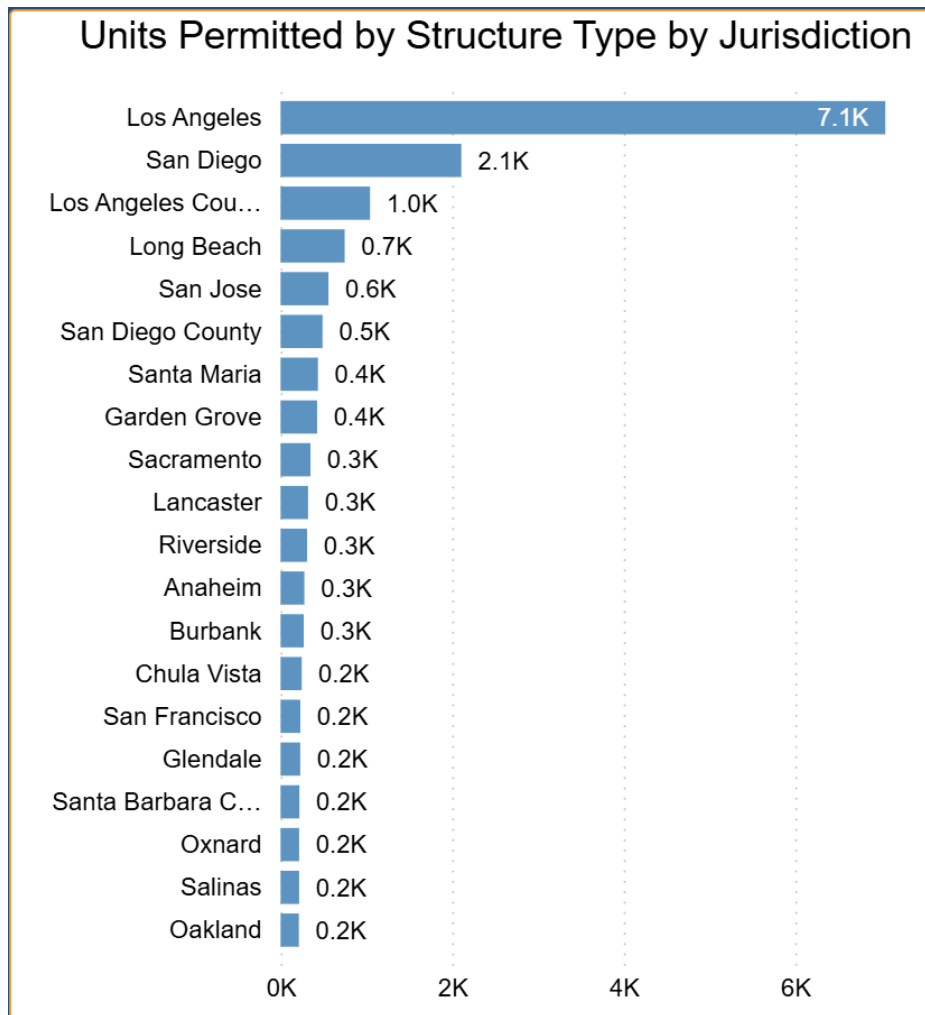


Figure 2 HCD Housing Element Implementation and APR Dashboard showing ADUs permitted in CA by jurisdiction in 2024

Additional analysis will be needed to determine if there is a correlation between this data and excavation public safety issues in California.

This data will be considered when developing targeted messaging and content, and when determining specific regions or counties where outreach and potential partnership efforts can be focused.

Drafting Key Messages

Several state and national public safety campaigns have been analyzed to better understand how effective, memorable safety messaging can be developed and implemented for the Awareness Campaign in California.

Drunk Driving – National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Drunk Driving safety campaign¹⁵ aims to eliminate risky behaviors associated with impaired driving. The website for the campaign contains a mix of laws, regulations, safety facts, and campaign materials.

The website breaks down ‘The Issue’ using these topics:

- Alcohol Effects
- Risk Factors
- Consequences
- Responsible Driving

There is a section that uses a chart to show the effects of blood alcohol concentration, including predictable effects on driving.

The campaigns highlighted uses a mix of videos, graphics, and statistics to emotionally connect with and educate the public about this safety issue.

- Buzzed Driving Is Drunk Driving: This campaign’s theme is that “If you have to do something to make yourself okay to drive, you’re not okay to drive.” It includes these messaging elements:
 - Planning
 - Steps for a responsible safe driving plan
 - Consequences
 - Costs and impacts of drinking and driving: monetary, loss of license, loss of car
 - Impacts
 - Drunk driving affects more than just the individual driver; others on the road, those involved in accidents
- Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over: This campaign uses statistics to educate the public about the dangers and consequences of driving drunk, with a focus on the holiday season. It includes these messaging elements:
 - Data
 - Number of deaths related to drunk driving based on holiday timeframes and specific months
 - Personal Responsibilities
 - Plan ahead to have a sober driver for holiday celebrations
 - The Law
 - Ties drunk driving to legal consequences
- Ride Sober or Get Pulled Over: This campaign is like the Drive Sober campaign but the messaging is tailored for motorcycle drivers, with a focus on the Labor Day holiday weekend. It includes these messaging elements:
 - Data
 - Number of motorcycle deaths in drunk driving crashes
 - Motorcyclists represent the highest percentage of drunk operators

¹⁵ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, [Drunk Driving](#)

(2023)

- Personal Responsibilities
 - Plan ahead to have a sober driver and motorcycle storage options
- The Law
 - Ties drunk driving to legal consequences

Work Zone Awareness – California Department of Transportation

The California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) promotes Work Zone Awareness Week each spring¹⁶ with a campaign that encourages safe driving through highway work zones. This campaign focuses on creating personal and emotional connections with drivers by putting actual CalTrans workers in the campaign visuals and letting those workers tell their stories with signs that say things like:

- I have a family waiting for me. Please slow down.
- One careless move can cost a life. Don't let it be mine.
- This is my office. Please Drive Safely.

This campaign aims to change the way drivers think about work zones; that they aren't just an inconvenience for drivers; they are workplaces where real people's lives are at risk. The campaign promotes behavioral changes for drivers, including:

- Eliminating Distractions
- Reducing Driving Speeds
- Staying Alert

Click It or Ticket – National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Click It or Ticket is a national campaign focused on seat belt safety.¹⁷ The messaging uses two main approaches:

- Enforcement: These campaigns run during high-impact times of the year to communicate the legal and safety consequences of not wearing a seat belt.
- Social Norming: These campaigns run year-long and aim to normalize a culture of seat belt use every day.

The enforcement side of this campaign provides actionable resources that can be used by local entities, including:

- Talking Points
- Sample Social Media Posts
- Graphics
- Ads
- Sample News Releases
- Links to the law

The social side of this campaign uses statistics to show positive trends; how the use of seat

¹⁶ California Department of Transportation, [Caltrans District 2 Launches New Campaign for Work Zone Awareness Week](#)

¹⁷ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, [Seat Belt Safety](#)

belts *saves lives*. There is a focus on personal responsibility and influence, such as call outs that children are watching their parents and are more likely to wear a seat belt if they see their parents wearing a seat belt. Several campaign resources are available, including:

- Talking Points
- Sample Social Media Posts
- Graphics
- Ads

NHTSA also has a general Seat Belt Safety website page that provides an overview of seat belt-related safety issues and some interactive learning features:

- Myths vs Facts
- Quizzes

Summary of Research Findings

Effective safety messaging can turn ideas into action. Public awareness messaging can be adapted for different audiences by combining storytelling with plain language. Safety messaging with a common theme can be delivered with different intents to increase exposure and support retention:

- Make an emotional connection
- Provide information
- Educate
- Distribute statistics and facts

Researching these safety message campaigns identified approaches that can be used to shape the Awareness Campaign:

- Understanding high-risk times of the year or locations can help determine when and where to push targeted messaging.
- A focus on personal responsibility and consequences of actions can achieve an emotional connection to messaging.
- Beyond personal consequences, communicating far-reaching impacts of unsafe actions may create a culture of safety where people consider others before making decisions.
- Reminding people that they have an opportunity, through their actions, to pass along a safety mindset to the future workforce can motivate them to approach safety with a mentorship attitude.
- Messaging should include *actionable steps* that can be taken to reduce risks; resources that make it easy to share this information with others should be easily accessible.
- Thought-provoking messaging can have a long-lasting impression that empowers the public to stop and ask themselves if they are being safe.
- Using real-life workers and situations as much as possible can help to remove abstract thinking about safety in daily life.
- Using a variety of statistics – showcasing both positive and negative consequences – can tell a full story and focus on reinforcing safe behaviors while redirecting unsafe behaviors.

- Using enforcement facts can be a strong supporting message.

Overall, this research has illustrated that safety awareness campaigns are complex and layered; there is no one-size-fits-all message or channel that will increase awareness of safe digging practices. Consistent, persistent, and thoughtful communication is needed to reach the California excavation industry's various audiences and stakeholders.

Determining Target Audiences

Different types of stakeholders in the excavation industry are being analyzed to learn how messaging can be personalized and crafted with relatable, understandable content so that it can reach the right people at the right time. Audience profiles that include demographics (who they are) and psychographics (what they care about and how they think) can provide insight that helps understand their characteristics and needs to determine the most effective ways to reach them.

Construction Worker Profile

Summarized Occupational Profile of a California Construction Worker:¹⁸

- Tasks Performed: Clean and prepare sites, dig trenches, set braces to support the sides of excavations, erect scaffolding, operate tools (jackhammers, drills, excavators) clean up rubble and debris, and remove asbestos, lead, and other hazardous waste materials.
- Top Skills Used: Coordination, operation monitoring, critical thinking, complex problem solving.
- Working Conditions: Frequently involves working outdoors and physical, hands-on labor.
- Top Work Values (Aspects of this job that create satisfaction.): Supportive environments, focus on relationships and service.

National Construction Worker Demographic Information:

- Median Age: 42 years old.¹⁹
- Median Income Estimate for Construction Laborers: \$45,300 per year.²⁰
- One in ten construction workers is a woman.²¹
- About half of construction laborers are Hispanic.²²

Contractor Profile

The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) recommends that only state-licensed contractors be used for projects:

¹⁸ State of California Employment Development Department, [Occupation Profile, California, Construction Laborers](#)

¹⁹ The Home Builders Institute (HBI) [Construction Labor Market Report Spring 2023](#), page 1

²⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, [Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2023, 47-2061 Construction Laborers](#)

²¹ [The Construction Industry: Characteristics of the Employed, 2003-20 : Spotlight on Statistics : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), slide 2

²² [The Construction Industry: Characteristics of the Employed, 2003-20 : Spotlight on Statistics : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), slide 7

- CSLB licenses and regulates contractors in 44 classifications that constitute the construction industry.
- There are approximately 300,000 licensed contractors in the state.²³

Summary of CSLB Requirements to Become a California Contractor:

- Any contractor performing work of \$500 or more (combined labor and material costs) must be licensed by CSLB to work in California.²⁴
- To qualify for a license, a contractor must verify four years of journey-level experience in the trade, pass both a trade and license law and business examination, and post a license bond.²⁵
- Contractors with employees must carry workers' compensation insurance.²⁶
- Must renew their license every 2 years.²⁷

Contractors in California might be self-employed, might own a business with employees, or might be an employee of a business. Contractors might also be hired for a project as a subcontractor. A single-family home can take, on average, 24 different subcontractors to build.²⁸

Summary of Audience Analysis Findings

Understanding of key audience groups is crucial for developing messaging that resonates and is actionable. Excavation in California touches many stakeholders who have both individual and shared motivations:

- Reputation
- Legal requirements
- Work or project responsibilities

Continued audience analysis will be conducted to gain a better understanding of utility operators, locators, engineers and utility designers, and other excavators that may not currently identify as an excavator (such as real estate agents).

Excavation stakeholders in California are supported by several agencies and associations that provide resources, information, education, and public engagement opportunities. Additional research will be done to analyze opportunities for partnership and collaboration, and to understand ways that the Awareness Campaign safety messaging can be implemented.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that the Board provide input on the direction of the Awareness Campaign

²³ CSLB, [History and Background](#)

²⁴ Department of Consumer Affairs, Contractors State License Board, [What You Should Know Before Hiring A Contractor](#)

²⁵ Department of Consumer Affairs, Contractors State License Board, [Workers' Compensation Requirements](#)

²⁶ Department of Consumer Affairs, Contractors State License Board, [Qualifying Experience for the Examination](#)

²⁷ Department of Consumer Affairs, Contractors State License Board, [General Renewal Information](#)

²⁸ National Association of Home Builders, [Average New Home Uses 24 Different Subcontractors](#), December 2, 2020
Special Study for Housing Economics, Paul Emrath, Ph.D., Economics and Housing Policy

development, specifically, any key considerations, additions, or modifications the Board would like staff to explore further as work on the Awareness Campaign moves forward.