

Underground Safety Board Comments

9/13/22

Good morning, my name is Piper Cole and I'm a volunteer Board Member of Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCFF), a 501(c)3 that acts as Napa County's fire prevention arm: working closely with CalFire, the Napa County Fire Department, and the Napa County Board of Supervisors.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experiences.

Let me start by saying that I think what you are doing here is a very valuable and important service and I agree that it is important to give underground utilities an opportunity to mark their lines so that damage, disruption and injury can be avoided.

That being said, the system could be improved and modernized to take into account projects that don't fit into its original scope.

I'd like to quickly describe my project:

- NCFF received a grant from Bank of the West to provide and install Reflective Address signs in greater Calistoga
- These address signs will each have badges for water source, pool, and turnaround, where appropriate, as well as the Napa County Evacuation Zone for that location.
- This project is intended to be a model project, which will be documented so that it can be copied and replicated throughout both Napa County and ultimately throughout California as a whole.
- Napa County FD Chief Jason Martin has said that these 911 address signs - including the information badges - are one of the most useful tools for all first responders.
- Of the 549 signs that will be installed for 466 residents, approximately 400 signs for 316 residents will be on 3-foot long, 1-inch square galvanized steel posts that must be driven into the ground

approximately 1 foot deep. These 400 signs are scattered throughout greater Calistoga, an area of over 70 square miles.

- We respect the necessity for notifying the utilities and having them alert us to any lines that could be damaged, so that we can avoid them. But we do think there has to be a better way to communicate our information to the 811 system. The 811 process, while admirable and a great time saver for discreet excavation projects, does not appear to be designed for wider projects like ours.
- What we have done is this:
 - Volunteers called the 316 people who signed up for a sign that required a post
 - We sent 8 separate emails with an explanation of why this was important and a list of answers to each of the questions for the ticker submission
 - We tried both encouragement and guilt
 - And at the end of the day, fewer than half the people submitted tickets to 811, and we received some complaints from people that the process was “broken”
 - In addition, when people did have to call in, many were told that the “contractor” should be the one submitting the ticket
- When I submitted my own 811 ticket (before I asked other homeowners to do it), I had to call mine in because my address was not in the database. I timed the call, and it took 15 minutes.
- Now given the time that I spent encouraging homeowners to submit these tickets and responding to their questions or criticism, I might have been able to submit 400 tickets, which would have taken a minimum for 20 hours, but it would have taken another hundred hours to drive around the 70+ miles of Calistoga to mark each property.

- Now I had a spreadsheet, with information from more than half of the residents about where they wanted their signs, and I offered this to anyone I could talk to in the 811 organization, but apparently there were technological barriers to taking the spreadsheet.
- The result is that we will drop off 137 signs and posts for the homeowners to install themselves, and if they didn't submit the ticket before, it is unlikely that they will do it now.

We are concerned, not only for our current project, but unless there is a more streamlined way to do this for larger scattered projects like this, we may not be able to proliferate this very valuable program throughout the state.

An email I received this morning from a resident:

I am writing this email to inform you that I have changed my mind about the placement of the reflective sign at 1561 CENTENNIAL CIRCLE, and would only like it to be posted on my metal mailbox post.

I also want to respectfully inform you, that the process to contact 811, was time-consuming and confusing. After I completed the process, I received a phone call from PGE, stating they did not understand what was supposed to be done, and had only received one other such application. I explained the process, reiterating exactly what was on the application, only to come home not only to find flags, but red and yellow spray paint on my driveway and sidewalk. This was very disappointing. I have since decided I only want the sign if I can have it directly on my metal mailbox post, for I am going to be doing some landscaping and do not want the interference of the sign. I am attaching a photo of my 811 outcome. Needless to say, my neighbors are not too inspired to join in.

I do have some feedback that I hope you can consider. While it is kind and considerate that you are supplying the labor to install the signs, perhaps instead, the installation should just be an option, with instructions and liability given to the homeowner.

I appreciate the efforts of the FireWise to protect our community.

Thank you,

Becky Franquelin

