



OFFICE OF ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY  
**UNDERGROUND SAFETY BOARD**

# 2023 WORKPLAN

JANUARY 2023

DRAFT



For a hard copy of this report, please contact the California Underground Safety Board at the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety at (916) 902-6000. The report may also be accessed on the Board's website: <https://energysafety.ca.gov/who-we-are/undergroundsafetyboard/>.

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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

Every year the Underground Safety Board (Board) reviews its past accomplishments and the needs and risks of the industries it regulates to formulate a set of objectives and activities for the coming year. This report highlights these activities for 2023.

## THE BOARD

The Board is composed of nine members, seven of whom are appointed by the Governor and one each is appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Rules Committee. The Board currently has two vacancies.

### Members



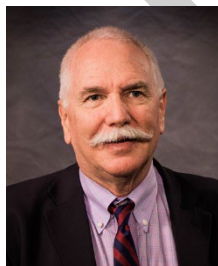
Ron Bianchini



Randy Charland



Marjorie Del Toro



Bill Johns



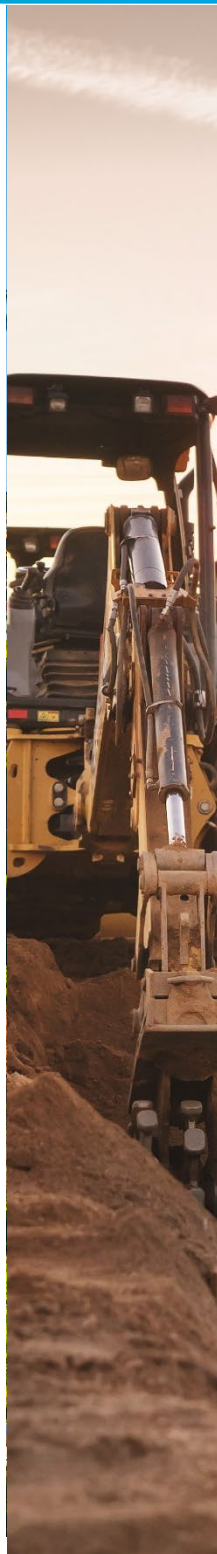
Marshall Johnson



Amparo Munoz



Carl Voss



## 2023 PLAN

The Board identifies the following activities to pursue in 2023 to further its mission. Many are multi-year efforts and will continue into future years. Activities that the Board has identified as meriting attention, but which are not scheduled in the calendar year due to dependencies on the completion of other activities or resource constraints, are identified as “Looking Ahead.”

### **Develop Processes to Assist Excavators in Identifying Unmarked and Abandoned Lines**

Excavators often find unmarked lines in the field, which they must treat as active. An excavator can, however, mistake an unmarked line for a nearby marked line, believe they have identified all buried lines, and subsequently strike a live line, creating a safety and service problem. Additionally, identification of the owner of an unmarked line is time-intensive for the excavator. Furthermore, these lines are often not updated in utility operator records, so the problem perpetuates for the next excavator.

The Board’s Abandoned Lines Committee plans to define abandoned lines, identify gaps in the current process excavators can use to identify the owner and line status of unmarked lines found in the field, and explore how unmarked and abandoned line information discovered during excavation may be preserved for use by future excavators.

### **Develop a Planning and Design Ticket**

Excavator and project owner decisions made prior to a one-call notification have a significant impact on the success or failure of an excavation, particularly in identifying the locations of existing subsurface installations. Excavators and project designers report challenges with receiving location information from utility operators, and utility operators report challenges related to designers requesting too much information and the significant time needed to respond to excavators requesting marks for design purposes.

To improve the project design process—and therefore the information excavators have in the field—and to ease the burden on utility locators, the Board’s Planning and Design Committee plans to develop a planning and design ticket to allow project designers to send information requests to utility operators through the one-call centers in a standardized manner. To

complete this activity, the Board will need to develop a definition of “design,” understand what information project designers need at different stages of the process, and understand the barriers that utility operators have in providing that information.

## **Align Electronic Positive Response with Statute and Communication Principles to Promote Excavator Use**

Electronic positive response from a utility operator is intended to provide the excavator with the “status of an operator’s statutorily required response to a ticket” (Gov. Code, § 4216, subd. (e)). Many of the existing stock electronic response codes do not adequately provide the excavator with status information or a path forward, or they imply excavator obligations that do not exist.

The Board’s Ticket Process Committee intends to review the existing electronic positive response codes and revise as necessary to further the goal of effective communication between utility operators and the excavator. The Committee also intends to review whether the “electronic positive response” branding is effectively promoting excavator use of these utility operator responses, or whether it too should be revised.

## **Develop Standards to Assist Excavators in Identifying Locations to Pothole**

Excavators are required to determine the exact location of all facilities in the excavation area before beginning excavation, but sometimes facilities change direction, raise or lower to cross other facilities, or have other appurtenances that make identifying the location through exposure in one area not predictive of the location in another area. Expose of all facilities for the entire excavation area is not always practical. Excavators need guidance on how to safely and effectively sample the location of utility infrastructure to reduce the likelihood that their excavation will unexpectedly encounter a buried facility.

To address this problem, the Board’s Potholing Committee intends to draft potholing standards for public review in the first half of 2023.

## Build Ticket Analysis Capabilities

Senate Bill 865 (Chapter 307, Statutes of 2020) amended Gov. Code § 4216.4 to require the one-call centers to provide the Board with ticket and damage information to assist it in data analysis and investigations. The Board is developing an information technology system to accept this information from DigAlert and USA North. The system is expected to be ready for use in mid-2023.

## Develop Notification Center Practices to Manage Locate Work Volatility

The work of utility locators is determined by external parties—the excavators who provide notification to the one-call centers. The volume of utility location workload varies which can make it difficult to staff. This can in turn lead to excavators not receiving marks on time during high-volume periods. In the extreme, some utility operators have reported receiving tenfold increases in tickets from one month to another.

To address this challenge, the Board's Ticket Process Committee intends to explore how notifications may be made further in advance of excavation, especially when the excavator is submitting a large number of notifications. To accomplish this, the Committee will need to review existing ticket data to understand the effects that process changes may have. This effort is expected to begin in mid-2023, once the Board's ticket management information technology has been developed.

## Use Technology to Improve Investigation Management

In 2020, Board investigators began using an investigation case management system, or DigCase. In the past two years, investigators have identified necessary improvements to assist in process efficiency and internal reporting, such as the capability for reporters and complainants to provide photographs and documents when they provide notification, templates for information requests, templates for investigation report components (such as timelines), and tools for evidence management.

Staff intends to contract for these system improvements in the next six months. This project is expected to begin in the second half of 2023 and continue in 2024.

## **Looking Ahead: Determine What New Facilities Need to be Incorporated into Utility Operator Geographic Information Systems**

Senate Bill 865 amended Gov. Code § 4216.3 to require utility operators enter location data for newly-installed subsurface installations into a geographical information system (GIS), but the California Regional Common Ground Alliance, through a submission to the Board's Idea Register, has identified an issue: utility operators are not clear on what constitutes a "new" subsurface installation.

The Board will look for opportunities to clarify, perhaps through regulation, what constitutes a "new" subsurface installation pursuant to SB 865.

## **Looking Ahead: Identify Notification Process Changes to Improve Useability for Novice and Niche Excavators**

Many specialty contractors and homeowners do not, but should, use the state's one-call system. However, the first-time experience can be challenging to newcomers. For example, the Board heard from a representative of the non-profit Napa Communities Firewise Foundation who had difficulty submitting hundreds of notifications for reflective sign pole installation. Additionally, as the one-call system's ticket request interfaces were not developed with agricultural work in mind, the Board's Agriculture Committee has had to develop user guides for farmers (a type of niche excavator) to aid them in obtaining area of continual excavation tickets. If these individuals and businesses are expected to continue to use the system after their first introduction to it, the user experience needs to improve for new and niche excavators.

The Board will look for opportunities to promote the one-call center user experience for those niche excavators as well as those new to the system.

## **Looking Ahead: Foster Adoption of the 811 Process Through Outreach and Education**

Investigations and outreach efforts have identified that many excavators appear not to use the one-call system because they do not fully understand the risk of striking buried facilities, so they believe that the process doesn't apply to their work. These groups include farmers,



rooftop solar installers, homeowners, and many specialty contractor classifications. For these groups, enforcement is a slow, expensive, and adversarial alternative to outreach and education. The Board has not, however, been allocated dedicated resources to address this education gap.

The Board will continue to look for opportunities to expand its outreach and education capacity.

## 2023 MEETING SCHEDULE

- January 9-10:** Sacramento
- April 10-11:** Southern California
- July 10-11:** Sacramento
- September 11-12:** Southern California
- November 13-14:** Sacramento

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THE CALIFORNIA UNDERGROUND SAFETY BOARD  
[www.energysafety.ca.gov](http://www.energysafety.ca.gov)

1516 9<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
916.902.6000

