
California Underground Facilities Safe Excavation Board

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Agenda Item No. 42 (Information Item) – Staff Report

Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach Workshops Update

PRESENTER

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SUMMARY

The Board's Education and Outreach Committee (E&O Committee) received stakeholder feedback emphasizing the importance of statewide coordination in education and outreach efforts. In response, the Committee held a series of workshops to collaboratively identify safety concerns and guide the creation of a strategic plan aimed at improving the effectiveness of education and outreach across the state. This report provides a summary of the workshop held on June 23, 2025, including participant feedback, data presentations, and proposed next steps.

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. As part of that activity, the Board must convene an annual meeting that meets the requirements of [4216.17\(a\)](#).

At the Board's 2023 Education and Outreach meeting¹, the Board facilitated a workshop to discuss opportunities to coordinate statewide education and outreach efforts among stakeholders. As part of the 2024 Workplan², staff conducted interviews with industry stakeholders to gain insight into their education and outreach programs and to analyze evaluation techniques and effectiveness. At the Board's 2024 Education and Outreach

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

² [Underground Safety Board 2024 Workplan](#)

meeting, staff presented the research findings and recommended that the E&O Committee conduct a series of workshops with stakeholders to better understand training issues from different perspectives in the call-before-you-dig process³.

Staff identified three goals for the workshops. The first was to engage stakeholders and understand training issues from all perspectives in the call-before-you-dig process. The second goal was for stakeholders to collaboratively develop education and outreach training based on the collected information and create an action plan to implement the training. The final goal was for the E&O Committee and stakeholders to discuss the appropriate metrics to establish to evaluate the success of the training.

To meet the goals of these workshops, the E&O Committee facilitated opportunities for excavators and operators to come together, share insights, and foster long-term collaboration as part of the Board's 2025 Workplan to "Establish a Framework for Coordinated State Education and Outreach."

Each workshop was designed to build upon the information gathered from the prior workshops, so each workshop's focus depended on the progress and results of the previous workshop(s). During the first three workshops, held in January, February, and May 2025, the E&O Committee heard participants' concerns regarding excavation safety training, which resulted in these key findings:

- Workshop attendees selected the underground infrastructure damage root cause "Failure to Notify 811" as the focus of discussions for the 2025 Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach workshops.
- Participants asked the Board to develop safety training materials related to "Failure to Notify 811".
- Participants stated that they would use and distribute those materials in their own outreach and safety training efforts to improve awareness of the 811 process.
- Participants stated that across many different excavation industry audiences there is a lack of awareness of responsibilities related to the Dig Safe Act (Government Code section 4216 et seq.) and calling 811.
- Workshop attendees discussed that while many stakeholders are collecting data and distributing educational and outreach materials, additional analysis and coordination of both could help further identify and address the reasons that people fail to notify 811.

JUNE 23, 2025, WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

This report summarizes information received from excavators, operators, and other stakeholders who participated in the June 23, 2025, Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach workshop. This workshop was two-and-a-half hours long and engaged with

³[September 4, 2024, Annual Education and Outreach Meeting, Item 8: Framework for Coordinated State Education and Outreach](#)

stakeholders to discuss messaging and outreach strategies that could best connect with people who fail to notify 811.

This workshop focused on using participant experiences, knowledge, and data to collaboratively strengthen the understanding of what messaging and communication strategies can encourage excavators to notify 811.

Outreach Summary

Staff utilized social media and email outreach to raise awareness for the event. The Workshop was also promoted through partners, including the California Regional Common Ground Alliance (CARCGA), DigAlert, and USA North 811.

Teams Webinar Registration Summary

Registration for the workshop was not required but was available as an option through the Teams Webinar registration form. Those who registered for the workshop received a confirmation email, and a reminder email one hour before the start time of the workshop.

A total of 24 people opted to register for the workshop:

- Eight of those who registered were confirmed to have attended the workshop.

In-Person and Virtual Workshop Attendance and Engagement Summary

There was a total of 23 attendees at the workshop:

- Eight in-person attendees:
 - Every in-person attendee participated by providing comments or responding to comments.
- Fifteen virtual attendees⁴:
 - At least one online attendee participated in each topic of discussion.
 - Most online attendees stayed for 90% - 100% of the workshop.

Representatives from 811 notification centers, utility providers, excavators, professional associations, government agencies, and municipalities across California attended.

Including both in-person and virtual attendees, the excavator stakeholder category had the largest representation. Notably, this workshop was the first in the series where excavator representation exceeded all other groups, demonstrating the impact of outreach efforts and the progress in engagement.

⁴ Virtual attendees: This value shows the number of unique logins, meaning the count reflects individual devices used to access the webinar. Some participants may have viewed the webinar as a group from a single computer or phone.

Workshop Discussion Items

Public Presentation of Industry Data

At the May workshop, the E&O Committee asked participants to share industry data to provide insights to better understand what's driving a failure to notify 811. At the June Workshop, the E&O Committee provided an update on this topic using data from the 2023 Common Ground Alliance DIRT Report Dashboard. The Dashboard was filtered to show data for California with No Locate Request as the root cause group and showed these trends: August was the month with the highest number of damages; Tuesday was the day of the week with the most damages; the excavator type was identified as 'contractor' in 51% of damages.

Workshop Activity: Safety Message Concepts and Communication Strategies

Through guided exercises exploring messaging strategies and communication channels, workshop participants collaboratively developed core messaging that they believed would resonate most effectively with prioritized audiences, with the goal of encouraging safe excavation practices. The prioritized audiences included in this exercise were: small construction companies, small-scale contractors, and landscapers.

Focusing on one audience at a time, the E&O Committee asked participants to:

- Consider audiences' awareness levels, motivations, and common barriers to compliance when discussing the messaging that might motivate people to notify 811 before digging.
- Draw from their own expertise and experience to identify the most effective communication approaches and delivery channels.

Audience 1: Small Construction Companies

When asked what kind of messaging might motivate small construction companies to notify 811 before digging, attendees proposed these motivational themes and suggested this messaging:

- Long-term savings:
 - Following the law and calling 811 saves money over time.
 - Skipping the step may seem like a timesaver, but it poses higher financial and safety risks.
- Community responsibility:
 - Avoid causing utility outages that impact customers and clients.
 - Doing the right thing benefits the entire community.
- Financial consequences:
 - 811 is the most expensive free service you never use.
 - Not calling can lead to costly fines, repairs, injuries, and safety hazards.
 - Calling is free. Skipping can cost thousands.
 - The most expensive free service you never use.
 - Call 811 for \$0. Skip it and pay thousands.

- Responsibility and liability messaging:
 - The person performing the digging must be the one to notify 811.
 - Education should come from leadership, reinforcing enforcement, and liability consequences.
 - Real-life examples that highlight dangers
 - Segmentation that breaks out responsibilities.

When asked what communication methods or outreach approaches would be most effective for small construction companies, attendees proposed several ideas:

- Door hangers and other physical materials were suggested as a more effective alternative to mailed advertisements. These materials could include multilingual messaging to reach diverse audiences, QR codes to track engagement, and small incentives such as refrigerator magnets or discount offers. Attendees stated that door hangers are particularly useful because they reach contractors directly at their homes, making them more likely to be noticed and acted upon.
- Many small contractors purchase materials from home improvement store chains, irrigation supply shops, and equipment rental locations, so partnering with these companies presents another valuable opportunity for outreach. Suggested strategies included: using geotargeted digital ads based on store visits, distributing stickers or signage at rental check-out counters, and incentivizing rental companies to display safety information through raffles or other rewards.
- Collaboration with workers' compensation insurers and trade associations offers additional avenues for engagement. For example, State Fund, a major workers' comp insurer, could be a strong outreach partner, although it currently does not provide any 811-related information on its website. Regional Builders Exchange chapters could also provide effective channels for reaching small contractors and spreading awareness about safe digging practices.

Attendees concluded that the best approach for communicating with small construction companies is to be blunt and direct, and that education alone isn't enough; contractors need to understand that calling 811 is not only smart, but mandatory, and skipping it could cost them more than they think.

Audience 2: Small-Scale Contractors

When asked what kind of messaging might motivate small-scale contractors to notify 811 before digging, attendees proposed these motivational themes and suggested this messaging:

- Contracts with large organizations:
 - These organizations mandate strict adherence to safety standards.
- Reputation and bidding qualifications:
 - Winning safety awards can enhance reputations and serve as powerful incentives for contractors to prioritize compliance.
 - Meeting qualifications for bidding lists can also motivate small-scale contractors

to be compliant.

- Preferred vendor lists:
 - Maintaining compliance is especially important to ensure continued access to valuable business opportunities.

Attendees also discussed several challenges that small-scale contractors might face:

- Miscommunication between subcontractors and project owners regarding who is responsible for obtaining the 811 ticket.
- As projects grow more complex and involve more participants, the risk of knowledge breakdown increases, further hindering effective compliance.
- Out-of-state contractors may lack familiarity with California's specific 811 laws, which can result in unintentional non-compliance and additional risks on the job site.

When asked what communication methods or outreach approaches would be most effective for small-scale contractors, attendees proposed that effective communication and outreach relies on a mix of channels tailored to audiences:

- Short-form social media videos are a powerful way to motivate people to contact 811 before digging. To stand out in busy feeds, the content should be engaging, entertaining, and deliver a clear, memorable safety message.
- One attendee mentioned that they wouldn't click on content that looked technical with charts and graphs as visuals, but he would click on something with an attention-grabbing headline such as, "How my coworker got hurt." He said he would want to know what happens next.
- Tailoring content to contractor needs and preferences, especially by using real stories and emotional appeals, should make communication more impactful and drive better compliance.
- One attendee mentioned that email stands out as an effective direct communication tool, boasting high open rates for them, such as 41% for workshop-related emails, especially when the subject line highlights compelling topics like legal updates.
- Short-form videos are favored over traditional articles, with real-world case studies and testimonials proving to be the most engaging content.
- Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and those offering giveaways or incentives, are useful for quick, attention-grabbing messaging.
- Despite the rise of digital media, in-person verbal briefings through tailgate safety meetings at the beginning of the work-day remain a critical channel, especially for reaching field crews directly.

Attendees concluded that the best approach for communicating with small-scale contractors is to link safety and compliance to business success, and engaging content that is short and to the point will have the best impact.

Audience 3: Landscapers

Attendees noted that they view landscapers and fence contractors as a similar audience, so

they included fence contractors as part of the discussion. When asked what kind of messaging might motivate landscapers to notify 811 before digging, attendees proposed these motivational themes and suggested this messaging:

- Pace of the work:
 - Worksite is analyzed and work may start as soon as the next day.
 - They are in a hurry and trying to stack their jobs and keep them moving to maximize the number of jobs they can complete in a week.
- Tight profit margins:
 - Work is done quickly and may unknowingly damage buried utilities.
 - Messaging should emphasize the thin profit margins they face and the high costs associated with repairs.
- Lack of understanding:
 - Messaging should emphasize that even simple tools, such as shovels, can cause significant damage to gas lines or fiber optics, and that the depth of underground utilities can be unpredictable.
 - Highlighting that calling 811 is free, but that repairs can cost thousands, can create a strong incentive. Effective messaging might include phrases like:
 - Don't make your project more expensive. Call 811 for free.
 - Repairing a cut utility line can cost thousands, calling 811 costs \$0.

When asked what communication methods or outreach approaches would be most effective for landscapers, attendees discussed that since this audience often prioritizes speed, effective efforts must focus on being short, clear, and tailored.

Attendees concluded that the best approach for communicating with landscapers is to link safety and compliance to their financial risks.

Activity: One Message Prompt

The E&O Committee asked participants to submit a one-sentence message that would encourage someone to contact 811. Attendees used their phones to access an online poll where they could submit their contributions. The top messages included:

- Don't dig a grave. Call 811.
- The most expensive free service you never use.
- Call 811 before you dig. It's free, fast, and could save a life.
- Call 811 to avoid calling 911.
- It's a shared responsibility, do your part!

JUNE 23, 2025 COORDINATED STATEWIDE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH WORKSHOP KEY FINDINGS

At the stakeholders' request, the Committee facilitated this opportunity for industry collaboration to explore messaging and communication strategies aimed at encouraging people to contact 811 before digging, which resulted in these key findings:

- Attendees suggested that future outreach should involve broader platforms, like city

signage and onsite project development signs, to maintain a long-term message presence.

- Attendees recommended that ongoing efforts include data evaluation and integration of 811 messaging into permitting, licensing, and insurance systems, as well as partnering with industry retail and rental suppliers, for sustained impact.

COORDINATED STATEWIDE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH WORKSHOPS KEY FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

Key Findings

The consolidated key findings for the 2025 Coordinated Statewide Education and Outreach Workshops are presented below by the goals that were identified for the initiative and then a summary of how each goal was addressed through participant engagement, discussions, and outcomes.

The first goal was to engage stakeholders and understand training issues from all perspectives in the call-before-you-dig process. Each workshop included participation from a variety of stakeholder groups, and the challenges identified differed from group to group. The E&O Committee heard perspectives from large companies, small companies, and associations that represent companies. They also heard from those that work and train in the field, and from groups that are focused on education.

The next goal was for stakeholders to collaboratively develop education and outreach training based on the collected information and create an action plan to implement the training. Attendees provided examples that demonstrated that education and outreach training content is widely available, more is in development, and that this content is accessible in many formats and in some cases, has been translated to Spanish. These workshops allowed stakeholders to share their knowledge of these resources, and to discuss how to increase awareness of these resources.

The final goal was for stakeholders to establish the appropriate metrics to evaluate the success of the training. Although specific metrics were not established during these workshops, initial progress was made by giving stakeholders the opportunity to present their own data and to learn about the data others are collecting and analyzing. This provided an opportunity for discussion about where gaps exist and what approaches can be taken to collect additional insights.

Outcomes

CARCGA formed a collaborative panel of subject matter experts – including representatives from utilities, excavators, call centers, and municipalities across California – to support the Board’s coordinated statewide education and outreach initiative. Some members of the panel participated in the Board’s workshops, but the panel met separately from those workshops. Their agenda aligned closely with the topics, activities, and findings from the workshops and

continued the discussion on reducing damage caused by not contacting 811 prior to excavation.

As a result, the panel developed an outreach strategy that they believe is both cost-effective and practical. Citing limitations of digital communications and utility bill inserts, they opted for a low-tech but highly visible solution: customizable door hangers. These materials feature safety messaging suggested by workshop participants and addressed accessibility issues identified in the workshops by providing Spanish translations and QR codes linking to regional training resources. The door hangers are intended for wide distribution by utility field staff, contractors, and through community events. The goal is repeated exposure and consistent messaging to drive behavioral change.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Board consider these next steps:

- Education and Outreach staff draft a project plan to develop content and implement awareness campaigns.
- E&O Committee conduct a series of workshops in 2026 to facilitate focus groups with stakeholders to get feedback on content for awareness campaign(s).