



Media Release

For Immediate Release

January 22, 2014

Crowns Target Reduction of Infrastructure Damage in 2014; Safe Digging Practices a Shared Responsibility

SaskEnergy, SaskPower and SaskTel are expanding efforts in 2014 to reduce the number of incidents where damage occurs to buried power, natural gas and telecommunications lines. The three Crown utilities have seen, on average, a rising trend of infrastructure damage over the past five years and want to reduce accidental contact with buried lines.

While requesting a line locate is a vital part of the safe digging process, it's also important the Crown utilities and their line locate contractor provide timely information to anyone planning an excavation project.

Last year, SaskEnergy had 255 incidents where its buried lines were contacted, while SaskPower had 197 incidents, and SaskTel 585 incidents. All Crowns have seen an increase in buried line hits over the past five years. To reduce this level of damage, the Crowns are planning the following activities in 2014, in addition to damage prevention programs already in place:

- a targeted and enhanced Sask 1st Call public awareness campaign and development of a Sask 1st Call Mobile App;
- a pilot project involving “safety patrols” to monitor construction activities in new Regina and Saskatoon subdivisions where increasing damage is occurring to buried infrastructure; and
- renewal of the contract for Magna Electric Corporation to perform joint line locating for all three Crown utilities. A North American industry leading practice has shown a safety improvement when one qualified technician locates multiple buried lines, rather than several companies performing this service individually.

SaskEnergy's incident reports show a rising trend of pipelines punctured in new urban neighbourhoods during activities such as landscaping, deck and fence installation and driveway paving.

“When safe digging is a responsibility shared by the Crown utilities, line locaters, contractors and homeowners, then an increase in construction activity will not result in an increase in damage to underground lines,” said Doug Kelln, President and Chief Executive Officer, SaskEnergy. “By working together during what will be another busy construction year, we improve public safety and reduce costly delays whether for major projects, or backyard home improvements.”

“Aside from service disruptions and the financial consequences of hitting an underground line, safety is a huge concern,” said Robert Watson, President and CEO at SaskPower. “Each time someone hits a power line, it has the potential to result in serious injury or loss of life. Ideally, we want to see zero incidents. The more we can do to prevent any incidents when it comes to working near underground lines, the better.”

Ron Styles, President and CEO of SaskTel says striking an underground telecommunications line can result in serious disruption to vital communications links within communities, such as emergency services. “We are very committed to working to lower these line cut figures, because in addition to the safety concerns associated with any disruption to underground infrastructure, the reliance on communications network services for both individuals and businesses today means outages can have far reaching consequences beyond mere inconvenience.”

All three Crowns are members of the Saskatchewan Common Ground Alliance (SCGA), an organization dedicated to ensuring worker and public safety, by promoting effective damage prevention practices in connection with underground infrastructure activities. The SCGA strongly encourages the public and third-party contractors to contact Sask 1st Call for free line locate services prior to construction and have a safe dig plan in place once work begins.

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