Call Before You Dig: Protect yourself, your land and your livelihood

Brewing an early morning coffee, operating farm and ranch equipment or watching TV at the end of a long day — all of these activities are made possible by more than 20 million miles of underground utilities that transport water, fuel, energy, electricity and even fertilizer across the United States and ultimately to end users like you.

Unfortunately, someone unintentionally hits these underground utilities about once every three minutes, and with every strike comes the risk of some serious consequences. The easiest way to avoid these dangers is to make a free call to 811, the national “Call Before You Dig” number, before starting any soil-disturbing project.

Here’s how it works: When you place a free call to 811, you’ll be connected to a local one call center that will contact professional line locators to mark your underground utilities at no cost to you. You may need to provide the one call center with basic information about the project, including the address, driving directions, the type of work you will be doing and the day you will start.

Within two to three days, line locators will mark your underground utilities with spray paint, flags or both. Once the lines are marked you can safely work around them. Arrangements to locate private utilities, such as underground lines to a well or outbuildings, must be made separately and will be completed at your cost.

Farmers are the caretakers of America’s heartland, and it’s important that you are able to do your job as safely as possible. Calling 811 is an important step in protecting yourself, you family, employees or others who may farm your property.

Always call 811 before activities such as deep tilling, ditching, soil ripping, installing drain tile and stockpiling materials. The one call process should also be used for construction activities like building fences, roads and berms and installing overhead or underground utilities.

Many farms and ranches have been passed down through a family for generations or operated by a single owner for decades. You or someone you know may remember when and where underground utilities were installed on your land. But the location and depth of these lines can change over the years due to erosion, previous digging projects or uneven surfaces, so it’s important to call 811—even if you think you may know what is buried in the area.

Always call 811 before you dig. Whether or not a one call is legally required for your project, this simple practice will protect you, your family, your land and your livelihood.