

AMERICAN LOCATOR[®]

MAGAZINE

Damage Review 2018



INSIDE...

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AMERICAN LOCATOR[®] MAGAZINE

VOLUME 32 ISSUE 6
January 2019



Damage Review 2018

<i>View from the Streets</i> Not Forgotten, Not Forgiven	4
<i>Excavation Safety</i> Destination Disaster: Lessons Learned from a Canadian Train Derailment	8
<i>Digging Dangers</i> 2018 Damages Dateline: Town Focus Lowell MA Homerville GA Aurora CO	10
<i>Digging Dangers</i> 2018 Damages Dateline: Briefs on Incidents Across the Nation	16
<i>Excavation Safety</i> NTSB Releases Report on 2016 Canton, IL Explosion: The Full Report, Images and Commentary	24
<i>The System Operator</i> Burning Down the House: Beleaguered California Utility Takes Heat for Ongoing Violations	32



On the Cover

A stunning photograph of the immediate aftermath of the gas line explosion in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin this summer. Incidents like this are still on the rise, p. 4.
Photo by Dennis McCormick, WI State Journal

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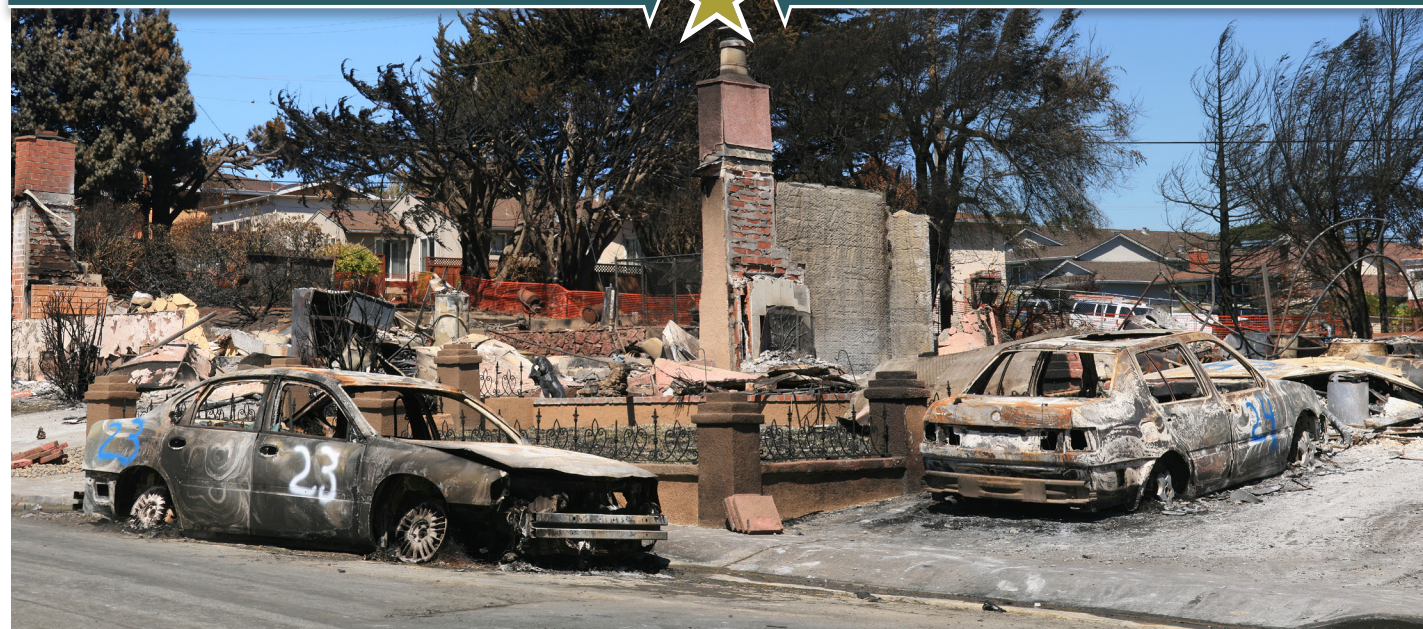
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Not Forgotten, Not Forgiven



Above: The 2010 San Bruno, CA gas explosion resulted in eight fatalities, numerous injuries and damage to property. Video courtesy: Brocken Inaglori.

I always look forward to writing the last editorial of the year with a mixture of excitement and dread. Will it be another doom and gloom forecast for the damage prevention industry? Are there any silver linings to those clouds, or is it all dark skies ahead? Unfortunately, it's a lot of bad news right now. The 2018 DIRT Report showed a 5.5 % increase in damages across the board, and even though that number paralleled a corresponding increase in construction activity, it still means we are a long ways away from the ideal world of zero damages.

Minor hits and damages are happening every hour of every day, while major utility explosions this year in places like Sun Prairie, Wisconsin and Aurora, Colorado led to fatalities and severe injuries. Long-delayed reports from the National Transportation Safety Board on fatal explosions like the Canton, Illinois disaster in November 2016 (over 2 years ago!) only confirmed what many of us already knew: the gas line strike was entirely avoidable if safe-digging practices had been employed. Meanwhile, major utilities like the Pacific Gas and Electric Company are currently being investigated for violating one-call rules, a practice that is almost certainly more widespread throughout the industry.

Any good news Matt?? Not much guys, though I was buoyed recently by our annual end of the year event, The Roundtable, where we bring the best and brightest minds of our industry together for two days of debate and discussion of the hot topics facing us today. We will be bringing you the highlights of that event in our next issue coming out in late February/early March.

We also have an exciting new project that we will be working on and telling you about soon, but it is currently under wraps. This project spun directly out of exciting Roundtable talks and discussions and will hopefully be our next step in helping to prevent damages.

I want everyone to be extra safe out there in 2019. The work is not stopping any time soon, but that is no reason to skip steps or cut corners: your livelihood, your business and your LIFE is at stake.

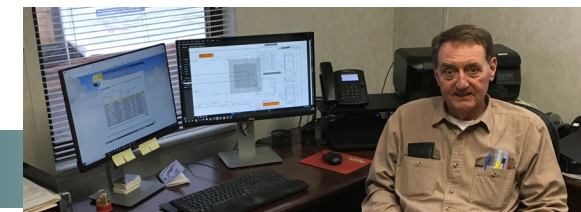
Site Surveillance in Modern Damage Prevention

In 1729, the writer Jonathan Swift wrote his straight-faced satirical essay *A Modest Proposal*, in which he suggested that poor and starving Irish peasants could ease their suffering by selling their young children to be served as food for the wealthy elite and upper classes. His essay was shocking at the time but served as a heartfelt reminder of the impoverishment and class-disparity he saw everywhere around him.

Now, here we are nearly 300 years later, and we have another modest proposal, slightly less satirical than Swift's, but no less powerful or timely. Allen Scott of C.W. Matthews Contracting Company, Inc. had previously contributed an article to our magazine in Volume 32, Issue 4, and here he has submitted another excellent write-up, this time on the practice of "site surveillance," another common-sense practice that should be ubiquitous in our industry, but is not.

A Modest Proposal *by C. Allen Scott*

Letters to the Editor



If you head north on Atlanta Road beginning at its intersection with Windy Hill Road in Smyrna, Georgia, in four miles, you will cross South Marietta Parkway. Prior to the widening of this section of Atlanta Road, it was two lanes attempting to accommodate four. Not only was it host to vehicular traffic, it carried the infrastructures of transmission power, distribution power, traffic management communications, traffic signal interconnection, cable TV, telephone, gas, water, sanitary sewerage and storm sewerage. This section of Atlanta Road passes just to the west of the runway of Dobbins Air Reserve Base. When the President visits Atlanta, this is where Air Force One lands. When Atlanta Road was improved, AT&T advised prospective bidders that there were high profile communications that were dedicated to the President whenever he was on the base. I could tell a good story about how this advisement was received, but that would be getting into politics.

Atlanta Road was improved through a series of three projects, all of which were awarded to C. W. Matthews Contracting Company, Inc. (CWM) in Marietta, Georgia. CWM is my employer, and February 14, 2019 will mark the completion of my twenty-fifth year as a utility coordinator for CWM. I was the utility coordinator for the Atlanta Road Projects.

For me, the most remarkable accomplishment of the Atlanta Road Projects was its record of utility damages. In the space of five years and four miles, there were only four utility damages. Make no mistake, there was plenty of opportunity for damages to the complex utility infrastructure of Atlanta Road. I would like to brag and claim that this phenomenal record resulted from my utility coordination, but that would be categorically false. The phenomenal record resulted from the efforts of one man that I can only identify as John Doe. Of the four damages, only one belonged to John, and had it not been for a broken tracer wire, the damage count would more likely have been three.

John served the project as Site Surveillance Technician. Several of the facility owners/operators had joined their bill paying departments together and had hired a contract locator with the understanding that the contract locator would staff the project with a full-time locate technician. That full-time locate technician, better known as Site Surveillance Technician, was John Doe.

I have often said to deaf ears that if you really want to mitigate utility damages on highway construction projects, you should study John Doe. As we began to work, John would meet with us daily and ascertain where we were going to be working. Usually, John had anticipated our schedule well

enough to have facilities designated well in advance of our actually needing them (designating is the legal term for marking in Georgia). As we exposed facilities, John would enter the excavation and connect his locating apparatus to the exposed facility. He would then refine his designations using a better signal. Once John had made sure that he was well ahead of us with designations, he broke out the post-hole diggers and began the process of visually confirming his designations. As we guarantee 35 hours during the winter months, our project manager would provide John with assistance for accomplishing the visuals when it was too wet to perform moisture-sensitive tasks.

Not all of the facility owners/operators of Atlanta Road bought into site surveillance, and not all of the facility owners/operators of Atlanta Road were very responsive toward designating facilities. One day, armed with a Pipehorn®, I was attempting to designate facilities that belonged to an unresponsive owner/operator, but not having any success. We had to find these facilities and survey them in the horizontal and vertical planes so that we could calculate grades for a storm drain. Perhaps I should say "recalculate

grades" as the plans did show grades, but the designer had pretended that we enjoy utility services without utility infrastructures. Thus, as we threaded storm drains through utility infrastructures, we pretty much discarded the design and made sure that we achieved positive drainage while maintaining enough cover to grow grass.

I called John Doe and said, "Look, I know that your company has not been contracted to designate the facilities of XXXX, but I know that their facilities are here, that we are going to intersect them with the proposed storm drain, and that we

have to get this storm drain in before the next rain event. XXXX is not going to designate their facilities, will you?"

John hesitated, and then said, "If my boss finds out that I have designated facilities for XXXX, I'll get fired."

I responded, "I understand, John, but I promise you that no one will ever know about it."

Regrettably, that is why I have not been able to identify the Site Surveillance Technician. I promised that I would never divulge the name of the man who designated the utility facility that I could not. Using John's designations, we promptly exposed the facility, surveyed it, and successfully drained the site when the next rain event occurred.

"I remember thinking, ...something is majorly wrong here, when the man who is doing the most to prevent damage is worried that he will lose his job—by doing his job."

-C. Allen Scott

I remember thinking that day, "Something is majorly wrong here when the man who is doing the most to prevent damage is worried that he will lose his job—by doing his job."

"...I think the damage prevention world is currently fundamentally flawed in its approach." When I read those words of Fred LeSage in the July 2018 issue of *American Locator* magazine, I recalled my thoughts on the day that John Doe risked his livelihood to prevent a damage.

It is embarrassing to admit it, but I had to go through a year and a half of engineering school before I ever realized that you cannot arrive at the solution until you understand the problem. In my opinion, "the damage prevention world is currently fundamentally flawed" because we are seeking to arrive at solutions without understanding the problem. The problem with today's damage prevention world is that it seeks to cobble a shoe that will fit all feet. It is stating the obvious, but let's state it anyway: no such shoe exists. We simply cannot draft legislation or write rules that accommodate all excavation and damage prevention challenges.

The closest thing that I have seen to the universal shoe in my 25 years of utility coordination is site surveillance. The problem with site surveillance is twofold: first, John Does are rare, and second, it is expensive. This prompts the question of dedication. Are we really dedicated to damage prevention if we attach a "cost not to exceed" to it?

I suggest this: assign the costs of site surveillance to the excavator and not the facility owner/operator. (I realize that most excavators have stopped reading now.) Project owners should write site surveillance into their proposals so that when excavators are bidding the work, all excavators are including the costs of site surveillance in their bids. (I realize that most project owners have stopped reading now; so, if you're a facility owner/operator, and you're still with me, please hear me out.)

The State of Georgia-Department of Transportation (GDOT) has written a specification that requires contractors to include the costs of site surveillance in their bids. The specification has never "gotten off of the ground." One obstacle is cost. Clearly, the cost of site surveillance would be passed on to GDOT if this specification were to prevail. Could not GDOT, (or for that matter, any project owner) recoup the added costs of site surveillance by raising the permit fees of owners/operators? There were other obstacles that were brought up when GDOT was considering the aforementioned specification, one of which was the certifications required for locate technicians of gas facilities. True, this presents its challenges, but I don't think that these challenges are insurmountable if we are as committed to damage prevention as John Doe was and is (he continues to designate facilities to this day).

I realize that I've lost practically all of my audience now; so, if you're one of the two readers that might still be with me, now might be a good time to end. Thanks for reading. Allens@cwmatthews.com.



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DESTINATION DISASTER

"The day a gas explosion occurs as a result of a drill strike in a crowded urban setting when evacuations didn't happen fast enough, will we look back and see that it didn't have to be?"

by Fred LeSage, Senior Construction Risk Engineer - AXA XL

Picture taken from a Sûreté du Québec helicopter of Lac-Mégantic, the day of the derailment. Photo by: Sûreté du Québec.

On July 6, 2013 at about 1:15 am, a 74-car freight train carrying crude oil rolled down a grade from Nantes and derailed in downtown Lac-Mégantic, Quebec. The resulting fire and explosion of multiple tank cars left forty-seven people dead. More than 30 buildings in the town's center, roughly half of the downtown area, were destroyed. All but three of the thirty-nine remaining downtown buildings had to be demolished due to structural damage and petroleum contamination of the town site. The Lac-Mégantic event was clearly a disaster with a terrible toll in both human life and property damage, not to mention the lasting negative effects on the life of what had been a vibrant community. But it didn't have to be.

Since the 1960s, North American railroads had used the DOT-111 tank car (Canada calls them TC-111 cars) to transport all kinds of volatile products, including crude oil. The DOT-111 specifications were adopted by the US Department of Transportation and are published in 40 CFR B Part 179. The ethanol boom of the late 2000s, followed by the oil boom of the 2010s, saw the number of DOT-111 cars in service grow dramatically, with as many as 30,000 DOT-111 cars added to the US fleet each year. The addition of all those cars resulted in a spike in car loadings and miles travelled by DOT-111 cars as well. But there were problems. DOT-111 cars were known to be vulnerable to rupture during derailments, and there was a series of high profile events involving such ruptures. A 2009 event in Cherry Valley, IL saw 19 cars of ethanol derail. Thirteen of them ruptured, resulting in leaks and/or fire. One person died and six people were injured in the fire as they waited at a grade crossing at the scene of the wreck.

In August 2011, USDOT put out directions on improvements to the DOT-111 design (so called CPC-1232 cars) that would begin appearing in new rail cars by early 2012. Then the Lac-Mégantic event happened. Following the event investigation, in May 2015, the Federal Railroad Administration and Transport Canada jointly announced the new DOT-117 specification to supersede the DOT-111 design, of which all examples would be required to be retired from flammable liquid service by May 2025. (Canada has since decided that all DOT-111 cars will be removed from flammable liquids service by January 2019 and is accelerating the removal from service of CPC-1232 cars.)

So what has all this railroad/train stuff got to do with utility damage prevention?

We are seeing a boom in the installation of 5G fiber in many US metropolitan areas. I would argue that in many parts of the country there are more directional drills at work than at any time in our history. To go along with that, there is a peak in dig tickets and locators in the field every day. I would also argue that the damage prevention methods we're using are delivering the same results they have for the last five years or so. And that has provided some high profile events. In particular, Canton, IL in 2016 and Sun Prairie, WI in 2018 both experienced damage events. Both events resulted in a fatality and both resulted in massive amounts of property damage. That's bad enough, but frankly we've been lucky. We haven't had a Lac-Mégantic-like event...yet.

After Lac-Mégantic, railroads and regulators alike were able to look back and see that the event was in a way predictable. Derailments resulting in the loss of integrity of DOT-111 tanks (sometimes with spectacular fires and explosions) had happened for years. It was a known problem. When you combine that with the fact that thousands of miles of railroads run through thousands of communities in the US and Canada, it was probably only a matter of time before a train would derail in a populated area resulting in multiple casualties and massive property damage.

So, isn't it possible that we could predict a Lac-Mégantic type event in the buried utility industry?

The parallels are all there:

- There's a boom in the industry with 5G fiber being installed everywhere.
- We're using the same technologies (directional drills and plastic gas pipe) that we have for decades.
- We're following all the same rules of operation that we have since 811 began.
- We've had our spectacular events (Canton and Sun Prairie are just two recent ones).

All we're missing is the unfortunate alignment of circumstances that came into play in Lac-Mégantic. The day a gas explosion occurs as a result of a drill strike in a crowded urban setting when evacuations didn't happen fast enough, will we look back and see that it didn't have to be? Will operators,

excavators and regulators then spring into action forcing prompt changes in operations and equipment designs? It's what railroaders, tank car owners and regulators did after Lac-Mégantic, so I would bet yes.

But do we have to wait for massive loss of life and millions in property damage to take those steps? Why couldn't we just imagine that the event had already occurred and take those actions now? I'm betting the railroaders and their regulators wish they had acted before Lac-Mégantic. And I'm betting the families of the 47 people who lost their lives in that event know they should have.

References:

American Association of Railroads CPC-1232 - Requirements for Cars Built for the Transportation of Packing Group I and II Materials with the Proper Shipping Names "Petroleum Crude Oil" "Alcohols, n.o.s." and "Ethanol and Gasoline Mixture" - issued August 31, 2011.

Press Release: Derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway. July 6, 2013.

NTSB Safety Recommendation R-14-005 issued January 21, 2014.

NTSB Safety Recommendation R-15-006 issued April 3, 2015.

Kube, Kathy. "Improving the DOT-111 Tank Car." *Trains*. Oct. 2013: Page 18.

Vantuono, William C. "Canada revises tank car phase outs." *Railway Age*. September 20, 2018.

PHMSA Final Rule on Hazardous Materials: FAST Act Requirements for Flammable Liquids and Rail Tank Cars effective August 25, 2016.



DAMAGES 2018

DATeline



LOWELL, MA

January 3, 2018

A large water main break forced the closure of parts of Thorndike, Middlesex and Appleton streets January 3rd as water gushed from the Lord Overpass. The rushing water cascaded downhill, flooding the streets as city crews scrambled to contain the leak. After the break was reported, local police closed streets that were inundated with about a foot of water. Water gushed out of the ground as Lowell Water Utility crews scrambled to shut off the water flow, even as cars plowed through the flooded streets.

A contractor conducting surveying for the Lord Overpass project drilled into the 16-inch water main, said Lowell Regional Water Utility Executive Director Mark Young who was on the scene within minutes. The incident occurred in front of Durkin's Carpeting & Interiors. Young did not immediately know the name of the company. But shortly after crews shut off the water flow, a New England Boring Contractors truck removed the large drill bit from the road.

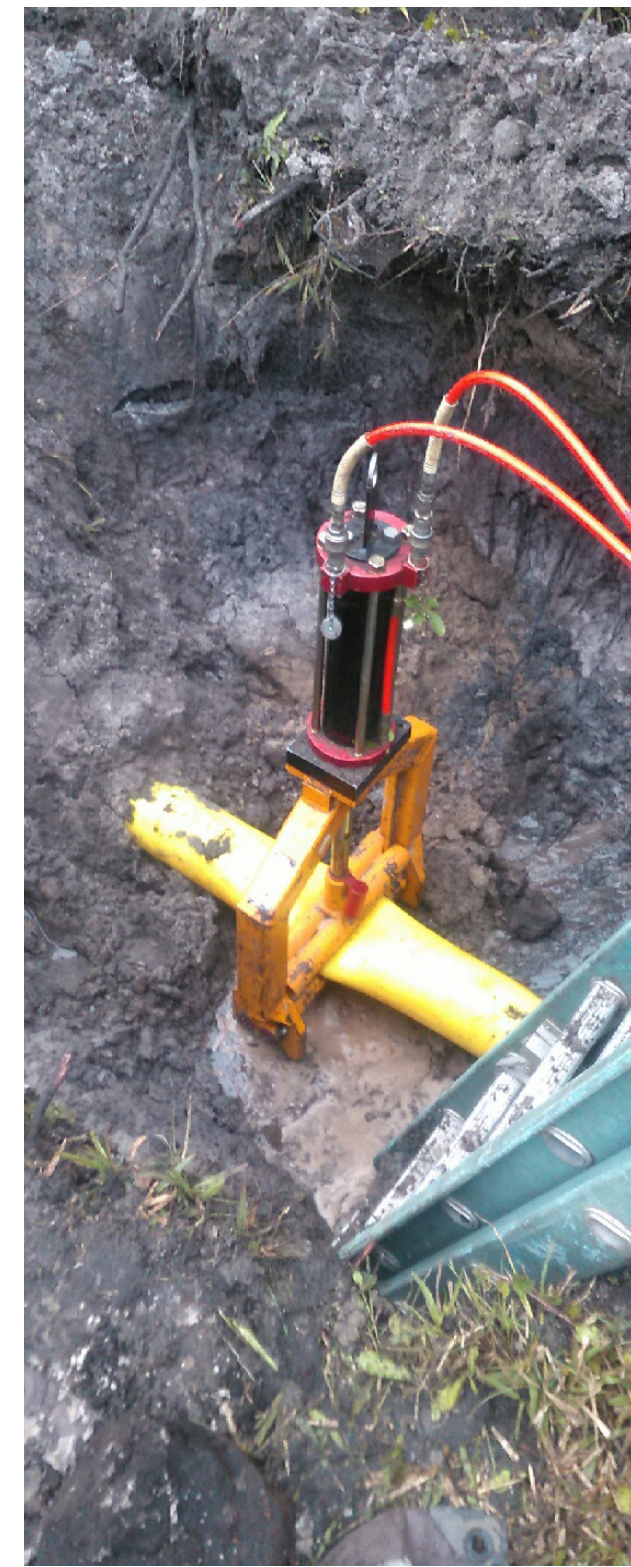
Fire Chief Jeff Winward said two nearby businesses were affected by the break. Water was shut off to Durkin's Carpeting & Interiors and the Owl Diner, but the rest of the neighborhood had water, he said. The inbound lanes of Dutton Street turned into a river while the water flowed. Winward said a sand truck was sent out to treat the wet streets to avoid icy conditions.



Above: Crew workers examine the drill bit that struck the water main.
Photo credit: The Sun News.

MARTIN COUNTY, FL

January 8, 2018



Left: Thousands were inconvenienced in Martin County after construction crews ruptured a six-inch gas line.
Right: Crews clamped the leaking gas line so they could start repairs. *Photos courtesy: Martin County BOCC.*

HOMERVILLE GA

August 17, 2018

On August 17, 2018, three women suffered severe burns after an explosion occurred at Coffee Corner coffee shop in Homerville. The blast destroyed the building and two cars parked nearby. Local authorities reported that a construction crew installing fiber optic line nearby had hit a gas line, and that gas had leaked into the sewer lines leading to the shop. Investigations of the sewer system at a later date revealed the sewer line had also been pierced by boring activity.

Dramatic video captured on coffee shop surveillance camera (photo on right) showed employees and a customer ducking for cover as the blast occurred. The video also helped investigators in determining the origins of the explosion.

The GA Public Service Commission was investigating the digging circumstances and would determine if fines would be levied.



Above: Security cam footage from Homerville coffee shop showing the moment of the explosion. Video courtesy: Glenn Allen.

Below: A page from the GA State Fire Marshal's Office incident report highlighting witness testimony.



Georgia State Fire Marshal's Office
INCIDENT REPORT
Official Law Enforcement Report - Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited

Incident Type: Explosion / Accidental
Agency Incident ID: 20181101
Investigation Title: The Coffee Shop

Result Type: Actual
BATS ID: 873077

Title
Investigative summary

Description
Case number: 20181101
On 08/17/2018 at 1400 hours I, Investigator Shane Taylor with the Georgia State Fire Marshal's Office, was at 112 E. Dame Avenue in Homerville, Georgia for the purpose of investigating the explosion of a coffee shop. I was requested by the Clinch County Fire Chief Danny Strickland. Chief Strickland initially indicated that there had been a natural gas leak prior to the explosion.
On 08/17/2018 at approximately 1000 hours the [redacted] Telephone Company was having [redacted] to do an underground boring operation in the area. At this time they discovered that they had struck a natural gas line. They halted the boring operation and called for the Gas company's assistance. At approximately 1115 hours [redacted] company arrived on scene and began to locate the leak. The leak was capped off by the Gas company. The Clinch County Fire Department was on scene and checked various buildings for the aroma of leaking gas. They didn't notice any natural gas smell in the immediate structures. Chief Danny Strickland stated that the [redacted] company informed him that the leak was capped off and there was no further danger. The fire department then returned to their stations.
I made contact with Ray Cason of Windstream, who states that he witnessed the explosion. Witness Ray Cason was to the rear of the Coffee Shop, and he was in the process of locating phone cable that was underground. Cason states that about ten minutes after the gas was capped is when he seen the explosion. Cason states that he witnessed the roof of the Coffee Shop raise up about 5 to 6 feet in the air and then come back down.
I spoke with Michael Anthony Dixon, employee of [redacted] Telephone Company. He states that he was overseeing the underground boring operation that was being conducted by [redacted] Dixon made a statement to the Clinch County EMA Director Will Joyce that one of [redacted] employees was drinking or smelled of alcohol. I asked Dixon about the [redacted] employee drinking. He stated that one of the employees still smelled like a night of drinking, but he did not suspect him of being under the influence at that time. Dixon states that at 1001 hours he called for the fire department when he realized the boring machine had struck a gas line. He stated that he knew a gas line had been hit by the natural gas coming through the boring tunnel. He had the boring operation shut down and he called for the gas company to respond. He states that the gas company arrived between 1100 and 1115 hours.
[redacted] supervisors present at the scene declined to make a statement. They put me in contact with their investigator, Tommy Sipsy.
I, along with ATF CFI Josey Visnovske, investigated the scene. We began by photographing the scene from the exterior. I noticed that the front of the structure had a glass window front. The glass debris was scattered

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Law Enforcement Sensitive



Above: The aftermath of an explosion in Homerville, IL. Photo credit: Glenn Allen.
Below: Image of cut gas line from Georgia State Fire Marshal's Office incident report.



cut gas line.JPG



Georgia State Fire Marshal's Office
INCIDENT REPORT
Official Law Enforcement Report - Unauthorized Dissemination is Prohibited

Incident Type: Explosion / Accidental
Agency Incident ID: 20181101
Investigation Title: The Coffee Shop

Result Type: Actual
BATS ID: 873077



8/23/2018



BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE



Beleagured California Utility Takes Heat for Ongoing Violations

Story, p. 34.



Incident Timeline

SEPT 9, 2010

Defective welds and irregular pressure on a 30-inch steel gas transmission line cause the massive PG&E pipeline explosion in a San Bruno neighborhood that kills eight people and destroys numerous homes.

MAR 3, 2014

A house explosion in Carmel, CA is eventually blamed on poor pipeline maintenance and faulty record keeping by PG&E, issues that were a major factor of the San Bruno explosion.

APR 9, 2015

The California Public Utilities Commission fines PG&E a then-record \$1.6 billion for violations leading to the San Bruno explosion.

NOV 8, 2018

A downed PG&E power line ignites the devastating Camp Fire near the town of Pulga, in Butte County, creating the most deadly and destructive wildfire in California to date, killing 86 civilians and destroying nearly 19,000 structures in its wake.

JAN 12, 2012

A state ordered report from the California Public Utilities Commission shows that PG&E diverted more than \$100 million in gas safety and operations money, and used it for other purposes, including profit for stockholders and bonus payouts to utility executives.

APR 1, 2014

PG&E is indicted by a federal grand jury for multiple violations of the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act of 1968, specifically relating to its record keeping and pipeline “integrity management” practices.

AUG 15, 2016

PG&E is found guilty of six of the 12 charges filed against them, including obstruction of justice, and ordered to pay \$3 million in fines and perform 10,000 hours of community service.

DEC 5, 2018

A San Francisco law firm files a class-action lawsuit against the utility over the Camp Fire, claiming that PG&E did not take preventative measures to fix its infrastructure, which they knew was aging, and vulnerable to weather.

DEC 14, 2018

The CPUC issues a report saying that PG&E violated state one-call law by failing to respond in a timely manner to excavators’ locate requests, and falsely reported and undercounted tens of thousands of late tickets between 2012 and 2016.



Devastation in San Bruno, California in 2010 was caused by a gas pipeline explosion.
Photo credit: Broken Inaglor.

On the morning of November 8th, 2018, at 6:33 AM, a Pacific Gas and Electric Company worker reported that there was a fire burning under some power lines near the small town of Pulga, California in Butte County. This small fire, aided by high winds, soon erupted into what became known as the Camp Fire: the most deadly and destructive wildfire in California's history, killing 86 civilians and destroying almost 19,000 buildings.

While the causes of this deadly fire are still under investigation, early indications are pointing to a badly maintained steel hook that broke and allowed a high-voltage cable to fall to the ground, thus sparking the fire. Normally, this might be something that a utility and its insurance company could handle, but the problem is that PG&E is technically considered to be a "felon" due to its numerous convictions stemming from the disastrous San Bruno pipeline explosion in 2010 that killed eight people and nearly levelled an entire neighborhood.

INCREASED SCRUTINY

Since the San Bruno explosion, PG&E has been more or less under continuous scrutiny from the state of California, it's powerful Public Utilities Commission, the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and numerous environmental groups. It has also been under investigation by everyone from the San Bruno Police Department to the National Transportation Safety Board and PHMSA, all while having to fight off endless lawsuits from the victims of these crimes, and even class action suits from their own shareholders.

Though the timing is terrible for PG&E on the heels of these recent wildfires, a massive report from the Commission's Safety and Enforcement Division,

conducted during this critical time of increased scrutiny and oversight from previous malfeasances, has led regulators with the CPUC to announce on December 14th, 2018 that they have opened an investigation into whether the utility violated state law by falsifying one-call ticket records. A follow-up statement from the CPUC on December 21st, 2018 outlined the aims of the Commission's investigation, as well as the reasons why. CPUC President Michael Picker minced no words in statements to the press regarding PG&E: "Utility falsification of safety related records is a serious violation of law and diminishes our trust in the utility's reports on their progress," Picker said in a statement. "These findings are another example of why we are investigating PG&E's safety culture."

LIE BEFORE YOU DIG

The report from the CPUC states that under California law, utilities are obligated to locate and mark underground assets within two working days from the dig start time indicated by the requestor of the one-call ticket. When the utility fails to locate their lines in that designated time, the contractors file "late tickets" with the utility. The CPUC's allegations against PG&E are twofold: first, that they did not respond in a prompt and timely manner to excavators' one-call requests to mark their lines. And second, that when late tickets were filed in response to this, that PG&E knowingly falsified records that they had indeed responded within the legally mandated timeframe.

This failure to keep accurate records has resulted in the undercounting of tens of thousands of late tickets each year from 2012 to 2016, and an additional 5,000 or more late tickets for the first two months of 2017. Crucially, this was the critical time where PG&E was under intense scrutiny from all sides stemming from the San Bruno disaster. "This is the period immediate-

ly following the 2010 San Bruno gas explosion and fire that resulted in eight fatalities, numerous injuries and damage to property," the order said. "This commission would expect that after such a tragedy, caused by multiple proven violations of law, PG&E would have sought to vigorously enhance and increase its effectiveness in all aspects of its gas safety."

Despite the serious allegations, the CPUC's report was clear that it had not yet fully determined if PG&E had broken the law, and even offered a possible reason why this had happened. PG&E did not have the necessary personnel to locate and mark every utility in a timely manner, despite pressure on employees to do so, and that "it was common knowledge among supervisors that locators entered false notes to avoid tickets from going late." A follow-up statement from PG&E to the Los Angeles Times seemed to acknowledge these mistakes, and claim improvement in many areas:

"At PG&E, our most important responsibility is public and employee safety. We're committed to accurate and thorough reporting and record-keeping, and we didn't live up to that commitment in this case. Once that became apparent, we took and continue to take additional actions to meet the regulatory standards related to our Locate and Mark record-keeping. Among those actions are: improvements to our system that tracks 811 tickets; an upgraded review and audit protocol; hiring more employees, and enhanced training for employees, to perform this work. We are aware of and cooperating with the CPUC's investigation. We are fully committed to keeping our customers, communities and co-workers safe every single day."

This statement was seen as just more lip service to people like California State Senator Jerry Hill, whose district contains counties including San



Above: San Bruno Pipeline Explosion Memorial.
Photo credit: Wayne Hsieh.

Bruno. Hill's response was: "What PG&E has been saying about improving its gas system and making it safe was just another PG&E lie. The state of California should look at taking over PG&E. We are lucky we have not had even more tragedies because of PG&E."

PRACTICAL APPROACHES

The CPUC investigation will attempt to determine whether or not the failure by PG&E to locate their lines in a timely fashion exposed any underground infrastructure to damage, and whether the company violated any relevant rules or laws. Perhaps more importantly, because PG&E is currently serving five years of probation for their San Bruno criminal convictions, a CPUC finding that they did indeed falsify records and break state statutes would then violate the first condition of their probation, which is that it shall not commit any illegal acts.

CPUC's Michael Picker said the Commission will be considering the "systemic safety issues at PG&E" while it plans its next steps to obtain input on

the various ways to approach these serious problems with PG&E's safety culture. "We must be careful and practical," said President Picker. "This process will be like repairing a jetliner while it's in flight. Crashing a plane to make it safer isn't good for the passengers." Options and proposals on how to control and discipline PG&E that have been put forth by the Commission, seem to run the gamut from commonsensical to potentially drastic:

"It was common knowledge among supervisors that locators entered false notes to avoid tickets from going late."

-CPUC Safety and Enforcement Division



- Should PG&E retain new corporate management?

- Should some or all of the existing PG&E and PG&E Corp. Board of Directors be replaced by Directors with a stronger background and focus on safety?

- Should the CPUC condition PG&E's return on equity on safety performance?

- Should PG&E's natural gas and electric distribution and transmission divisions be split into separate companies controlled by a holding company?

That last option seems to be a reference to the looming possibility of bankruptcy for the giant utility. On Monday, January 7th, PG&E faced even more bad news as their stock fell to a low of \$18.93 per share, down 22% from \$24.40 the previous Friday, and down almost 60% from \$48.80 on November 7th, the day before the devastating Camp Fire wildfire erupted. This recent stock plunge arrived in the face of news that PG&E could be held responsible for at least 30 billion dollars in damages as a result of the wildfires. Since their current insurance coverage would only cover about 1.4 billion dollars, commentators have speculated that the utility could be facing bankruptcy, or perhaps would have to sell off parts of the company, like its natural gas operations.

It also remains to be seen if PG&E's role, if any, in the Camp Fire would also be a violation of their early mentioned probationary status. U.S. District Court Judge William Alsup, currently overseeing PG&E's probation, has recently ordered an assessment of whether "any inaccurate, slow, or failed reporting of information about any wildfire" by PG&E might violate its probation. Regardless, it is clear that the environment of safety and damage prevention at PG&E is in major trouble, and in danger of facing some serious repercussions for their actions.

As of press time, it was reported that PG&E intends to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection by the end of January. *American Locator* will be following up on new developments regarding this story.

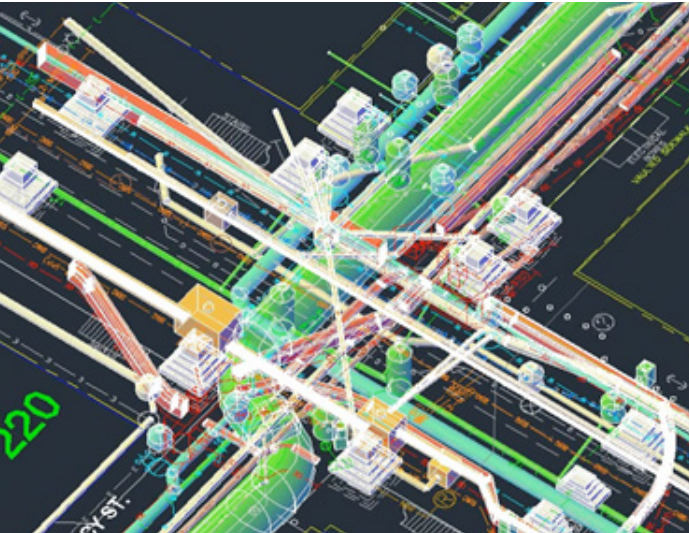


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