

AUG 01 2012

SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC
UTILITIES COMMISSION

From: John Wellnitz RE: Northern Natural Gas, OC12-001

Date: July 30, 2012

To the South Dakota One Call Notification Board, this letter is pertains to the notice of complaint OC12-001 filed by Northern Natural Gas in regards to pipeline damage. I am 25 and this is my first time dealing with this kind of legal issue so I will try to give the type of information you are looking for. I did not know that it is a law to call 811 before digging. Having recently got a backhoe for tile starter holes I was getting familiar with the controls by doing some cleanup and simple tasks. On July 12 I went to bury an old rock pile that was somewhat unsightly and in the way. I thought I was working in a safe place but it turned out that the rock pile had been made almost directly over this gas line. When I saw an unnatural looking piece of black material in the hole I stopped and dug around a bit with my hands and uncovered the edge of the pipe. At that point I stopped digging and went home. I called 811 to try to report the damage to the gas company, which I later learned was put together as an emergency request to locate. However the message got to them right away so that worked out.

The area I was working in is away from the road and by a waterway in a field. The photo that Northern Natural Gas sent showing the trucks is a minimum maintenance road used primarily for field and pasture access. I was the only person present, so there were no other possible injuries. Certainly had I understood the situation fully, that it was mandatory to call first, where I was digging, and the potential danger and problems that could have been caused I wouldn't have tried to bury the rock pile.

I don't know if this is the proper place to bring this up but in the complaint form item 5 Northern Natural Gas estimated the damages to their facility to be \$25,000. Considering they also stated that there were no customers affected that cost seems absurdly high. The first response from them was late afternoon on the 12th which was mostly just a quick inspection and to turn the pressure down. The following morning (13th) they brought a backhoe to properly expose the damaged area. Then there was a waiting period from about 11:00 a.m. till 2:00p.m. while higher pressure was being run for the turbine plant in Huron. The last employee to leave the sight left at about 6:00 p.m. on the 13th. Starting from the very first response on the 12th to the finished work on the 13th it is close to \$1,000 per hour average for a relatively simple repair. A good deal of time on the 13th was spent waiting on the x-ray service. One employee told me he had expected them to be out of there by about 10:00a.m. were it not for the x-ray. I consider myself to be responsible for the damage but I would need to see a complete breakdown of the costs as well as the time that each procedure was done and which services were used to know it was accurate and fair.

I have read the handbook you sent, thanks for that. Also I have put visual one call reminders in the backhoe and tractor to help ensure there is no digging or scraping done without thinking of it. As unfortunate as this incident was I'm glad it happened now in a situation where damage was limited and no other workers were present rather than remaining unaware and having a worse problem later. It is thoroughly embedded in my mind now. If you would like to discuss anything I can usually be reached at (605) 350-5431. Thanks, John Wellnitz Signed: 