

Bulletin 2023-30

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Increasing Number of Incidents of Pipeline Contact Damage During Ground Disturbance

Over the last three years, we have noted a 69% increase in the number of pipeline incidents related to contact damage during ground disturbance (26 incidents in 2020 to 44 incidents in 2022). Of particular concern in 2022 is a 243% year-over-year increase in licensees contacting their own pipelines (from 7 incidents to 24; known as a “first party incident”). Further information on pipeline safety can be found in the AER’s annual [Pipeline Performance Report](#).

All persons conducting ground disturbance, including those not regulated by the AER, must do so in accordance with Part 5 of the [Pipeline Rules](#), including taking “all precautions reasonably necessary to ascertain whether a pipeline exists before commencing any work, operation, or activity.” Unsafe ground disturbance practices can be very dangerous; they can result in serious injury, cause significant environmental damage and outages, and become very costly.

All pipeline contact damage in Alberta must first be reported to the pipeline licensee and then to the AER, even if no product is released. The incident must be investigated to determine the cause of the incident and what measures must be implemented to prevent future occurrences. Reburying a pipeline that has damage to the coating or the pipeline without fixing the damage appropriately is not permitted and could result in a serious pipeline failure in the future.

Below is a list of *some* of the things a person conducting a ground disturbance must do:

- Familiarize yourself with Part 5 of the *Pipeline Rules* and sections 32, 33, and 35 of the [Pipeline Act](#).
- Thoroughly search for pipelines within 30 metres of the perimeter of the area you are planning to disturb.
 - Contact [Utility Safety Partners](#) (formerly Alberta One-Call) and request a locate be done to identify the location of any pipelines and buried utilities before conducting any ground disturbance.
 - Not all pipelines may be registered with Utility Safety Partners. Additional research may be needed, and one must always be aware of surroundings while digging.

- Take extra precautions when digging in congested areas with multiple pipelines to ensure all pipelines have been identified appropriately, including extra hydrovacating if necessary.
- Contact the licensees of any identified pipelines. Clear communication between the licensee and those conducting the ground disturbance is critical.
 - In cases where there may be no responsive licensee for a pipeline, contact us at pipelineoperations@aer.ca for further instructions.
 - Once located, if mechanical excavation equipment will be used within 0.6 metres of the pipeline, the disturbance must be directly supervised by the licensee.
- Ensure the competency and training of the personnel conducting the ground disturbance is appropriate, current, and meet the requirements of the *Pipeline Rules*.
- Keep all pipeline warning signs or markers visible and legible for the duration of the ground disturbance.
- Sufficiently hand expose the pipe for positive identification before using any mechanical equipment.
- When installing another pipeline by directional drilling methods, ensure that the drill path is known at all times, that the pipelines that are being crossed are sufficiently exposed, and that the activity is properly supervised to avoid contact.

Additionally, licensees are reminded that the *Pipeline Act* and the *Pipeline Rules* require that the risks related to ground disturbance and contact damage be managed through safety and loss management systems and integrity management programs that meet the latest edition of [Canadian Standards Association \(CSA\) Z662: Oil and Gas Pipeline Systems](#)—see specifically clauses 3.1.2, 3.2, 3.3, and Annex N.

For additional information regarding working around pipelines see our website, aer.ca > Providing Information > By Topic > Pipelines > [Working Around Oil and Gas Pipelines](#). If you have any questions, contact our Customer Contact Centre by phone at 1-855-297-8311 or by email at inquiries@aer.ca.