

## The Case for Rights-of-Way Management:

A collection of illustrative incidents arising from street cuts.

### **Background**

Telecommunications companies are but one of several utilities/providers that reside in the rights-of-way. Telecommunications providers must peacefully co-exist with gas, electric, water, sewer, steam and other telecommunications providers. According to Lee Marrs, president of Texas Excavation Safety Systems, Inc, a nonprofit corporation that serves as a clearinghouse in Texas for underground utilities, such peaceful co-existence is not readily found as there are hundreds of “dig-in” accidents every day.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than reprint an exhaustive list of such incidents<sup>2</sup>, local government has collected a series of events, which demonstrates how deployment of telecommunications infrastructure has impacted every other utility/occupier of the rights-of-way. Such lists demonstrate that local government management of the rights of way and requirements for mapping, insurance, bonding and compliance with safety standards and codes are neither punitive nor academic.

### **I. Water Mains**

- Southfield, MI - 9/22/02 Detroit Water and Sewer Dept. Officials blaming faulty underground installation of fiber-optic lines for massive water main break last Sunday that busted sections of Inkster and 12 Mile Roads and caused flood damage to a dozen homes in Southfield's San Marino neighborhood. It will cost millions to repair damaged roadway and pipes under Inkster Road and officials say it will be at least a month before the road is fixed. An instrument used to drill underground paths for fiber optic lines scraped the 60 inch mains that are between 35-37 years old. The fiber optics were installed by a small telecommunications company that provides telephone and Internet services, and were installed shortly before the intersection was rebuilt two years ago. "the tool got too close to the main. You can't blame the age of the mains because they are designed to have a life of about 60 years." The mains are located 20 feet below the road. From the Southfield Eccentric 9/22/02 [www.observerandeccentric.com](http://www.observerandeccentric.com)
- Labor Day 2000, contractors installing fiber-optic cable in central Dallas struck a water main. As a result of the damage, water gushed into the streets and poured into a parking garage below a luxury building, practically destroying two full

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the September 12, 2000 edition of *The Dallas Morning News*.

<sup>2</sup> We state reprint as such as list does exist and may be accessed at <http://www.underspace.com/acfile/index.htm>

levels of cars. By the time the flooding ended, the damage was well over \$4.5 million.

- Irving, TX - July 1999 - 4 foot diameter water pipe damaged by fiber-optic contractor boring under State Highway 114 hit the water line. Damage will be billed to Power Plus Directional Boring, the subcontractor that caused the damage. *Irving News* July 15, 1999

## **II. Power Lines**

- Seattle, WA - 4/27/99 - Power was knocked out for more than two hours to 2,800 customers when a cable-TV worker came in contact with a 26,000 volt electrical line on the roof of a four-story building.

## **III. Gas Lines**

- In Denver, two houses were leveled and another ten damaged in an explosion caused when a construction crew cut an eleven-inch hole in a natural gas line while installing a cable television conduit.
- Mayor Larry Meyer of St. Cloud Minnesota can tell you how sad he was to have to declare Saturday, December 11, 1999 a day of remembrance for citizens of his community killed when a natural gas pipeline was struck by subcontractors digging to install cable lines. Four people were killed, more than a dozen injured in the explosion with property damage in excess of \$1 million dollars.
- In Warrensburg, Mo., near Kansas, City, a subcontractor struck a gas line in July, 2001 sending fumes into a nearby sewer line. The gas spread to several homes. In one causing an explosion in a cloths dryer burning a man over 30% of his body.

## **IV. Phone Lines**

- South Arlington, TX - July 17, 1999 - 3,600 residents and businesses were left without 911 emergency service caused when a Southwestern Bell contractor cut a phone line at the intersection of Barton and Matlock roads.
- In Batavia, NY, telephone service for the entire city (presumably including 911 emergency service) was cut for over twenty-four hours when an inexperienced phone crew severed the main telephone cable serving the city. Local governments are especially concerned with the problems of potential accidents and accompanying liability they will face when they want to access a utility line blocked by the many wires laid by telecommunications providers.

## **V. Steam Lines**

- In San Francisco, where there had been over a dozen similar explosions in the preceding twelve months, a company ruptured a steam pipe underneath a downtown office building. If the explosion had occurred while the building had been occupied, hundreds of people would have been scalded.

## **VI. Sewers**

- Plano, Texas October 14, 2000 - A fiber-optic contractor drilled into a 33-inch pressurized sewer line resulting in what one public works official called “one of our deepest, darkest nightmares.” The city was forced to deal with the aftermath of in excess of 4 million gallons of raw sewage that seeped into a local waterway.