

Testimony on SB 20 before the Senate Utilities Committee
By
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Chairman Emler and members of the Committee. I am Mark Schreiber, Director Government Affairs for Westar Energy.

We support SB 20. SB 20 would require water and sanitary sewer utilities to be part of Kansas One Call. The bill provides a compliance date of January 1, 2008 before any new facilities must be locatable. It also provides the KCC rule and regulatory authority to establish appropriate tolerance zones and a protocol for handling hard to locate facilities.

We have discovered several instances where our workflow and productivity have been impacted by issues surrounding the current exemption of water and sewer utility operators from the One-Call Law. These instances fall into three distinct categories:

Contacting the Operator

When we initiate a Kansas One-Call ticket, we will also make a determination if the local water/sewer utilities in the area are also One-Call members, and if not, contact them. If it is within a city, we can usually contact the right person by phone or fax relatively quickly. However, if our excavation site is outside of a city, we have to review our maps and records for information about the operators in the area. We are not always informed of changes to the operator contact or facility information. This is time consuming for both us and the other operator, as sometimes we may be calling the wrong one if, for example, our excavation site is close to the boundary between two different water districts. If we have a contractor performing our work, they may also face this same issue.

Contacting the operator during emergencies also causes several problems. One would think that contacting the operator for an emergency locate after hours would be the most problematic, but usually the converse is true. After hours or on weekends, we can usually find the right person, usually at the listed home number. Emergency locates during the weekday are the most troublesome. It is harder to contact the right people during the weekday for some of the rural water districts, probably due to most being a small organization. Many of these districts may have only a few people to handle locates, water main installation and emergencies of their own.

Timeliness

Timeliness of the locates is the second problem we face when requesting locates from utilities not participating in One-Call. With some of the utilities, locates will take longer than the 2 working-day window provided for in the statute. Follow-up calls then become necessary, and at that point, we face the same issues cited above with the problems of contacting the right people.

Sometimes utilities that do participate in One-Call have to be called a second time. However, the process is less cumbersome to remedy. In these instances, we call in a 'Non-Response' locate request to One-Call which initiates another locate request ticket for the tardy utility.

Accuracy

The accuracy of the locates is our third area of concern. The frequency of this issue is relatively low but the consequences are significant. Granted, excavating into a water main may not be as dangerous as a gas main or an underground electric line, but the value of lost productivity to both the excavator and the operator, time processing damage claims and the disruption of utility services to the residents and businesses can add up.

We provide electric service to several cities that are not members of Kansas One-Call. Cities like Lawrence and Salina strive to provide the same timely and accurate underground locating services as a One-Call member. We do have to place a call ourselves, but in these cases, their hot-line number remains staffed 24/7 and always gets us to the right person, regardless of day, night, weekends or holidays.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I will be glad to answer questions at the appropriate time.