

## Investment in Excellence: *The Role of Effective Training in Damage Prevention*

/ BY TIM GALE, USIC DIRECTOR OF TRAINING

To perform all of the required tasks of locating underground facilities, the locate technician needs to know more than just how to hook up the equipment and mark out a cable or pipe. Preventing damages to all types of underground facilities requires the ability to meet federal, state, provincial and location-specific regulatory requirements. Locate technicians must be able to prioritize and work under pressure all while paying attention to many small details. They must interact with various people while performing their locating tasks and must be thorough with documentation and communication with others. As many who are new learn quickly, there is more to this important work than meets the eye!

The NULCA Competencies for Locate Technicians provide guidelines for training. Using locating equipment to locate buried facilities (in rural or urban settings) under actual or simulated conditions is, of course, a primary training requirement. However, utility locate technicians must have knowledge and understanding in a broader range of activities as well. To be successful, a locate technician must demonstrate competencies in all of the following areas:

- **Safe work practices and regulations**
- **Basic locating theory**
- **Use of the transmitter and receiver**
- **Marking procedures (both industry standard and local customer-specific)**
- **Knowledge of facilities and facility prints**
- **Visual observation skills**
- **One Call regulation, requests and documentation**
- **Excavator and customer relations**
- **Additional requirements such as “Operator Qualification” for locating gas facilities**



Justin Hall, a USIC technician in Kentucky, came to utility locating from the construction industry, but was only familiar with locating in a general way. After three months in his new job he said, “There is a lot

more than I anticipated. There is a lot of science and detail to this job! The thoroughness of the training and the structure in both the field and classroom helped me see the practical application of what I was learning.



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It was more in-depth than I anticipated.”

When asked about his experience going through training he responded, “This job isn’t for everyone and the training process was an effective way to help determine if I was a good fit for this work. If a person buys in during training, they have a good chance of success.”

Bill Payne, a USIC technician in Missouri, had roughly 10 years of previous experience from working for a water company where he first learned to locate, to working for a locating company and serving as both a supervisor and trainer. Even with this experience, Bill completed the USIC locate technician training before taking an area just outside Kansas City.

“Having a very qualified trainer with lots of experience is important for effective training.” Also important was the accessibility of good equipment, a laptop and other tools at the beginning of training. “Our trainer, John, created a team-oriented, welcoming atmosphere that helped us desire to learn and do well. This really built a strong foundation. I learned some things that were very helpful that I never taught when I was a trainer.” With his previous experience as a trainer, Bill firmly believes that “you

have to show a person how to do the job the right way, with the right tools, or they’ll never learn. It takes being told, shown and then doing the work yourself to learn effectively.”

Both Justin and Bill agree that, in addition to actually performing locates, there are other elements to their training that are critical to success. “Safety has to be a priority right out of the gate, before you do anything else,” said Bill. Justin said a tremendous part of this job is “dealing with traffic, animals and potential dangers around job sites. I’ve avoided many close calls on the job because of the way safety was stressed during our training.”

The USIC training emphasizes using a structured process to perform locates. Justin believes the way he was trained has helped him be successful. “I am much more productive because of the way I was trained. I don’t have to stop, pick up the phone and wait on a supervisor for help as much because I understand what I’m doing in most situations.”

Bill summed it all up with the following statement, “You have to build a foundation along with building the trainees’ confidence. They need to know that this job can be done correctly and completely every time. The safety of the public and our clients has to come first. Speed will come with time as long as you are consistent in what you do every time you get out of your truck.” **DP**



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