WORKSAFE SERVICES DIVISION
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
LEGISLATION INTERPRETATIONS

Topic	Trenching near utility lines or piping	Issued by: V.P., WorkSafe Services
Statute	General Regulation 91-191	Date Issued: Sept 13, 2005
Section	Section 180(2)	Date Revised:

180(1) Before beginning an excavation or trench, an employer shall ensure that the location of any underground utility line or piping is determined.

180(2) Where employees are working within 600 mm of underground utility line or piping, an employer shall ensure that

(a) the authority operating the utility line or piping has been notified of the operation,
(b) the utility line has been de-energized, and
(c) an adequate operating procedure is used by the employees.

For the purposes of this interpretation **underground utility line or piping** includes

- water
- other liquids (for example, petroleum products)
- gas
- electricity

Question

I am a contractor who is required to frequently perform trenching work where there is a risk of contact with utility lines or piping. According to the owners of the utility line or piping system, it is not always possible to de-energize utility lines or piping. Are there circumstances where work can be carried out within 600 mm (two feet) of the utility lines or piping without de-energizing them?

Response

For the purposes of Section 180(2), work is defined as work that makes use of mechanical or power-operated equipment (with the exception of machines using vacuum, water or air to expose utility lines or piping). Hand digging, in order to locate the utility line or piping, is the only type of work allowed within 600 mm of the utility line or piping without de-energizing, provided that:

1. the employees follow the procedure prepared by the owner of the utility line or piping,
2. the work is safe to be carried out, and
3. the work is allowed by the owner of the utility line or piping.

Unless prohibited by the owner, the use of mechanical or power-operated equipment is allowed up to 600 mm (two feet) of the underground utility line or piping.