

To: Workforce, Labor, and Economic Development Finance and Policy committee staff

Re: Telcom Installation Contractors Experience

I have been Engineering Supervisor here at Austin Utilities for over 24 years. I have been responsible for Damage Prevention here, including electric, water and natural gas utilities. Mapping and marking our underground utilities.

Austin Utilities has had horrible experiences with telcom installation contractors over the years. Most of the telcoms that operate in Austin hire the cheapest contractor they can possibly get. Which often means inexperienced and untrained. That often means they operate in an unsafe manner, hitting our facilities, including gas, far more often than should happen. Failure to safely hand expose utilities they cross before machine excavating close to that facility is the most frequent violation.

In 2023-2023-2024, Metronet overbuilt Austin with their fiber. They brought in inexperienced, untrained contractors, that were the cheapest available. The damages to our gas system shot up terribly due to all their work. Many hazardous gas leaks were created by their damages. The City of Austin, in charge of local city ROW, shut down all Metronet contractor activity from Sept. 2023-Nov. 2023, until Metronet could come up with a plan how their contractors could continue work on their overbuild safely.

I have been President of the Prairieland Utility Coordinating Committee (PUCC) for most of the past 20 years. PUCC is one of 6 UCC's throughout MN planning and conducting Damage Prevention Meetings with excavator each spring. Many of the discussions our committee has, revolve around what we can do to work with telcom contractors to get them to operate safer. We work in conjunction with Gopher State One-Call and the Office of Pipeline Safety.

I was very happy to hear of the changes made to 216B during 2024 that require a 40 hour safety course for all telcom installation contractors. Something sorely needed for years.

Sincerely,



Keven Maxa
PUCG President
Engineering Supervisor, Austin Utilities
507-440-4341
kevenm@austinutilities.com