

## **The Mystery of the Moving Plastic Pipe**

Recently while sifting through my mountain of papers and magazines in my “in box”, I came across some interesting reading. Several of the other State Rural Water Associations send us their version of Good Water News. This particular article was from the Minnesota Rural Water Association. It peaked my interest so I made a quick call to a water operator I know in Minnesota to get the low down on this new Minnesota regulation. This regulation requires that all new plastic pipe line must have tracer wire buried along side it so it can be located.

According to my sources this regulation was developed because of a very serious accident that occurred in Minnesota. I’m sure everyone has heard of stories where a directional boring machine has bored through a sewer line or hit a water line or some other utility. Well the story goes in Minnesota that a directional boring crew bored a natural gas line through a sewer main, of course the sewer backed up and a crew was called in to “roto rooter” the sewer line. The crew was of course unaware of the gas line and cut it; natural gas filled a nearby home, ignited, and blew up the house. An accident like this definitely gets peoples attention and the regulation was adopted.

We get called out quit often to locate service lines, curb stops, water mains and main valves. Over the course of the last several years on more than one occasion, I have been in someone’s front yard looking for a curb stop and the owner comes out and informs me I’m looking in the wrong place if I want to find his curb stop. About then I’ll run across it, dig it up and he will stand there and say, “now how did that get way over there. It used to be over in this corner of the yard”. Evidently it moved.

Locating ductile iron water mains and copper service lines usually is not a problem, but most of the water systems these days are using plastic water mains and plastic service lines. If this pipe is installed without tracer wire there is only one way to find it back, and that is with the “big locator” that’s right I mean a backhoe.

I’m the last person that wants to see another regulation for water systems to deal with, but my experience has been what goes around comes around, and some day this might happen in Nebraska. Hopefully this will never happen but it’s still a very good idea to bury tracer wire with all plastic pipes.

When burring tracer wire it’s a good idea to use under ground connector splices because if the wire breaks or is interrupted in any way that’s as far as you can locate it. As a rule you can locate wire for a couple hundred feet with out a problem. The tracer wire must come to the surface so you have a place to hook onto it with a locator. Several times over the years I have tried to locate plastic pipe where the tracer wire has been weed whacked off so it’s important to protect these exposed leads. There are several ways to protect these leads, you can use an electrical box to stuff the leads into, or you can purchase boxes that look a lot like a valve box you simply pull up the box lid and the

wires are exposed to be connected to. What ever you use make sure they cannot be weed whacked off or become a victim of the lawn mower.

With all the under ground utilities going in across the county I feel it's very important to protect your lines. The best way to do this is if you can locate them so they can be accurately marked.