

Part 503 – Safety

Subpart A – Engineering Activities Affecting Utilities

503.0 General

- A. Private and public utilities may be jeopardized and equipment operators and others may be injured during site investigations and construction of engineering conservation practices and project structures if proper safety precautions and procedures are not followed.
- B. Established procedures for locating utilities and notifying owners are the first step in eliminating many potential accidents. These procedures, if followed, will reduce personal injuries, property damage, and interruption of utility service.

503.1 Scope

- A. This subpart provides the minimum requirements for developing a plan to prevent damage to public or private utilities and injury to people from contact with utilities during engineering and construction activities.
- B. Public and private utilities include all transmission lines, cables, fiber optic lines, and pipelines.
- C. Other buried infrastructure, such as landowner-installed drainage tile or private waterlines, are the responsibility of the landowner to locate.

503.2 General Considerations

- A. NRCS personnel must take adequate precautions to minimize hazards from or damages to utilities, both overhead and underground, during location, investigation, design, and construction of any works carried out under NRCS programs, technical assistance, or both.
- B. Landowners or operators, sponsoring organizations, and contractors must be informed that they are liable for any damage resulting from disruption of service caused by construction activities. They must also be informed that NRCS makes no representation on the existence or nonexistence of any utilities. A letter may be used for this purpose. Absence of utilities on construction drawings is not assurance that no utilities are present at the site.
- C. NRCS may be held responsible for damage done by its employees during site investigations.
- D. Clearly show location of known utilities on construction drawings with appropriate symbols and identification. Indicate on the construction drawings or specifications that the contractor or landowner is responsible for contacting the utility companies prior to construction or contact the One Call system for the State.
- E. Each State office must develop a procedure for carrying out its responsibilities within these guidelines.

503.3 Investigations

If subsurface investigation or construction is proposed, the responsible NRCS employee must check with the landowner-operator or with the sponsoring organizations to determine if there are underground utilities in the work area. During field inspection, particular attention should be given to utility markers set in fence lines or elsewhere.

503.4 Buried Utilities

A. If buried utilities are known to be in the vicinity of the proposed work, the responsible NRCS employee must notify the landowner-operator or the sponsoring organizations of this fact and of the landowner-operator or the sponsoring organization's responsibility to take the following actions:

- (1) Notify the utility notification center (i.e., One Call Center, Dig Safe, or equivalent) or the affected utility company of time, place, and type of work to be performed.
- (2) Request that the utility owner locate and stake the buried utility on the ground, both horizontally and vertically.
- (3) Request that a representative of the utility company be present during any excavation operations.
- (4) Notify the contractor of the location of the utility in relation to the job work area.
- (5) Supply to NRCS in writing either the ticket number from the utility notification center or a certification that the affected utility company has been notified. States may set up their own procedures, with the aforementioned being the minimum requirement. Failure to notify NRCS that utilities have been contacted will result in termination of NRCS assistance.

B. The responsible NRCS employee must ensure that the preceding steps have been carried out by the landowner-operator or the sponsoring organizations before beginning work in the vicinity of the buried utility.

503.5 Documentation

The responsible NRCS employee must document action taken pertaining to work in the vicinity of buried utilities. The documentation must be maintained in the NRCS job file. In lieu of a separate checklist, the same documentation could be kept in the conservation assistance notes.

503.6 State Laws

If State laws and regulations have different requirements, NRCS must comply with State laws and regulations. Procedures may vary from section 503.4 of this subpart, if equivalent in effectiveness. If State requirements are more stringent, the State conservation engineer may supplement section 503.4 of this subpart, as needed.