Hardin County Extension News Release

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Am I Farming or Am I Excavating?

Hardin County – There are over 2.6 million miles of pipeline in the US that transport natural gas and hazardous liquids. Pipelines are the energy lifelines for almost every activity in everyday life. They transport the fuel needed to heat our homes, power our equipment, and generate the electricity we rely on. Our farms rely on pipelines for everything from fuel to fertilizer. America’s pipeline network stretches from coast to coast. There are pipelines in our communities, along our roadways, and under our farm fields.

Farm and ranch activities increasingly pose a safety risk to pipelines. Farm equipment is getting more powerful and can dig deeper. At the same time, erosion and terrain modifications can reduce the soil covering an underground pipeline.

Every state has passed “One Call” laws to keep pipelines safe. These laws require contractors, farmers, homeowners, and anyone digging to call 811 at least 2-3 days before starting their project. 811 is a free, national 3-digit number you can call from anywhere to have lines located.

Representatives use yellow paint and flags to show the exact location of gas or hazardous liquids pipelines. Once lines are marked, use care when working near the line. Do not use mechanical equipment within approximately 24 inches on each side of the pipeline. If your digging project is on or near the pipeline company right-of-way or easement, a company representative will likely be onsite during your project. Do not remove flags, stakes or paint marks until you have finished digging. If you expose a pipeline, a company representative will request to inspect the pipe before you backfill.

Most states provide a narrow exemption to their One Call law for “normal” farming activities. A key to this entire process is understanding “when am I farming and when am I excavating”.

Repairing fences, removing stumps, and cleaning out ditches may seem like everyday work on the farm, but according to state laws these activities require a call to 811. This activities on this list are often thought of as farming activities but are classified as excavating.

- Fence Building
- Drain Tiling
• Terracing
• Grading
• Contouring
• Ripping
• Deep Tilling
• Soil Sampling
• Tree or Stump Removal
• Clearing or Grubbing
• Ditch Cleaning
• Trenching
• Augering
• Road Building

“Normal” farming activities are limited to disk ing, plowing, planting, cultivating, and harvesting (as long as these activities occur at depths no greater than 12”). Terrain modifications at any depth should be preceded by a call to 811. Pipeline operators will come out and verify the depth of the pipeline both before and after the work to ensure your safety. If there is EVER a question, call 811 to be safe. The call is free, and the pipeline company will be glad you did. Representatives are always happy to talk about how to operate safely around pipelines.

Pipeline operators are committed to working with farmers and local ag extension agents to help keep our nation’s farmers, our pipeline infrastructure, and our land safe and productive.

Article written by Chris Thome, Program Director, Pipeline Ag Safety Alliance