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LETTER FROM THE CEO

B. Scott Crawford

As stakeholders across Virginia will most likely agree, now that we are more than halfway through 2026, it has been a busy year! Locate request volume has remained around 3% above last year. While Code 60 use is almost 8% below last year, No Shows have re-emerged as a challenge, almost reaching the record levels we witnessed in 2024. As such, excavation readiness has dropped to 80%, roughly three to five percentage points lower than what the state has been experiencing the past several years. While lower than average, and while not perfect, 80% excavation readiness is higher – and in some cases considerably higher – than what some other states are confronting.

For Virginia stakeholders, it is a reminder that we must continue to work together to relieve pressure on the 811 process. This includes scheduling locate requests up to 12 days out, reviewing Update locate requests to purge unneeded requests from the system, and paying attention to Locate Assist within Exactix when scheduling a locate request, particularly when the system indicates that the excavation area is experiencing above-average volume!

However, as you will learn in this issue of The Dirt, Virginia 811 is implementing the launch of a new platform to support Electronic White Lining (EWL) and create efficiencies for locators. Make sure you read the information about VAntage, the first-of-its-kind enhancement for EWL that will help locators easily identify where the EWL area is located at the excavation site without having to rely on text or line up images with the site. Virginia 811 is proud to offer this innovative application and hopes it will transform EWL processes beyond Virginia, allowing digital data to be more visible in the real world than it has been!

In this issue of The Dirt you will also learn about a host of items to celebrate. The state has reached its one millionth locate request – which provided a reason to celebrate. There is the announcement of Virginia 811's Golden Shovel Award winner. 811 anniversaries are highlighted, and the recipient of the Virginia 811 Damage Prevention Ambassador Award is put squarely in the spotlight!

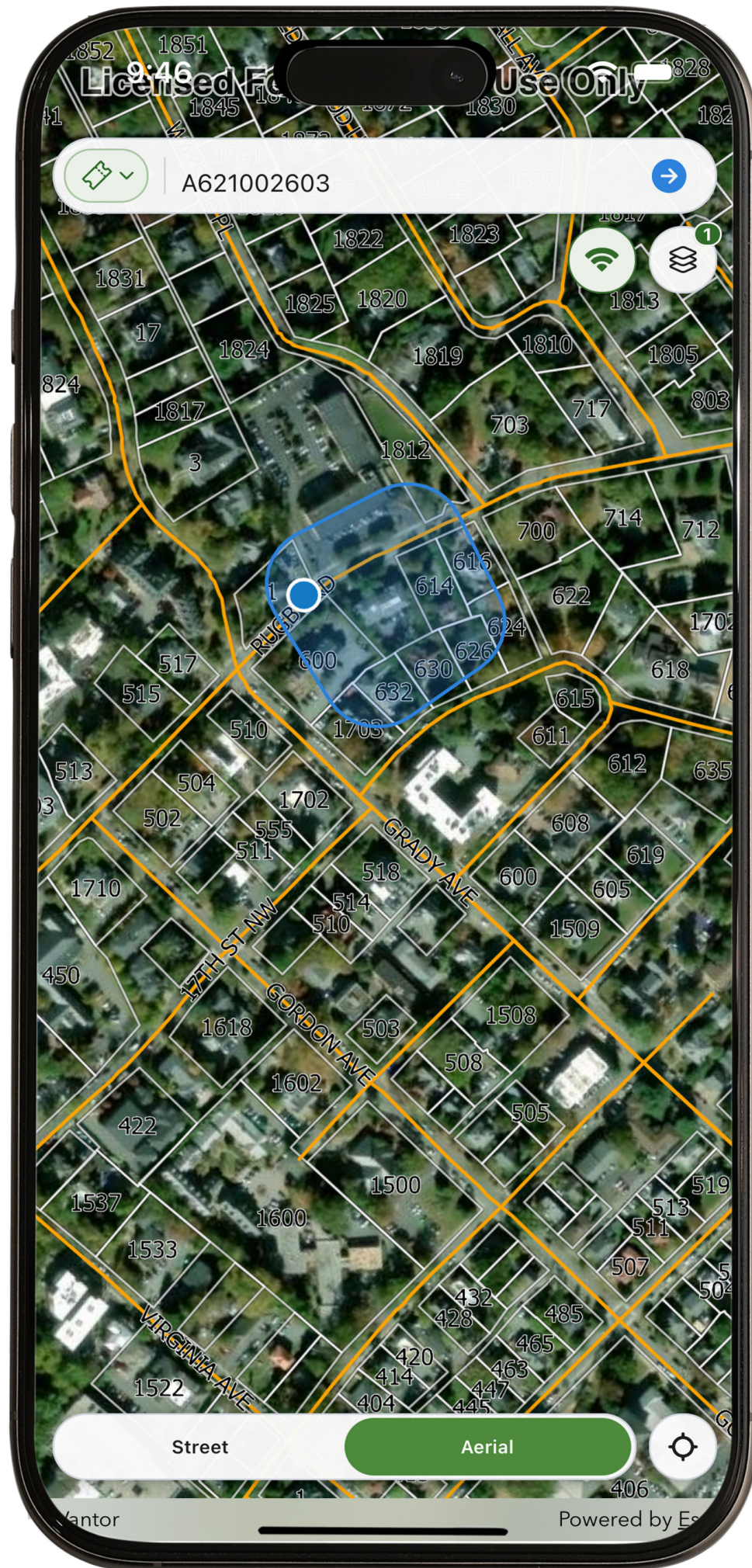
Be sure to take note of information related to the 2026 Paradigm training schedule – a training program Virginia 811 strongly supports! There is also information about the Mid-Atlantic Broadband Summit & Fiber Expo, sharing highlights from this very important industry conference focusing on the rage of the Post-Pandemic period: fiber! Finally, be sure to review the information related to the Alliance Nationwide Conference, information about the Virginia 811 Exactix Bootcamp, and the upcoming Excavator Town Hall!

This is just a cursory glance at some wonderful information found in this edition of The Dirt. Be sure to take some time and explore all of this rich content. And – please – be sure to reflect on the many ways you can directly contribute to damage prevention and relieve current pressure on the 811 process by simply planning and taking advantage of the resources and technologies that have emerged over the past few years. Be safe!

B. Scott Crawford
President & CEO
Virginia 811

Bringing Electronic White Lines into Focus: The Launch of VAntage!

- B. Scott Crawford



A real challenge with locate requests is ensuring an accurate representation of the excavation area is found on the locate. At times, due to the complexity of the site, quite lengthy text-based descriptions can provide locators with a puzzle that is not entirely easy to decipher. With each locate carrying so much weight, the excavation description is incredibly important – it must be clear and it must be accurate. Long descriptions can undermine both clarity and accuracy – and can result in locators having to spend notable time at a site, impacting efficiency.

In 2023, the Virginia Damage Prevention Act was amended to specifically allow for Electronic White Lining (EWL) to both bring more clarity to excavation area descriptions and to improve locator efficiencies. With Virginia 811's conversion to the Exactix center software in June 2025, EWL was fully implemented.

However, in order to view the actual map containing the EWL outlined area, member and locator receiving software had to be set up to receive JSON delivered locate requests. This transition is ongoing, but there is still one other challenge to fully realizing the benefit of EWL: locators having to devote time to review a map, often displayed on computers in their vehicles rather than on mobile devices, in relation to the physical area they are working within. This is still arguably better than trying to orient where to mark utilities relative to a text-based description, but the process could still be improved.

Another issue was brought up early on in the discussion about EWL by Chris Rush, an investigator with the Virginia State Corporation Commission, Division of Utility & Railroad Safety. Chris indicated that it would be beneficial to have a means where an investigator could stand at the site of a damage and, using a mobile device, view a map indicating if the damage was inside or outside of the EWL area.

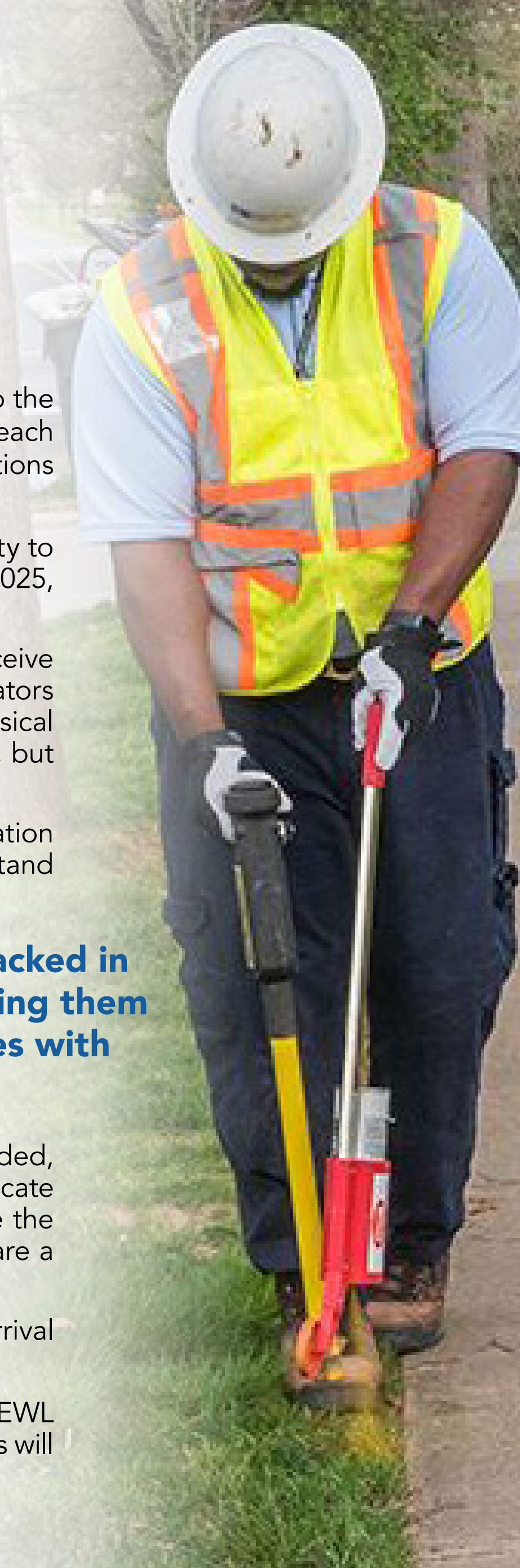
All of this has resulted in the creation of VAntage, the industry's first mobile application specifically designed to bring EWL into view on a map that also shows the location of the user. As the user moves, the user's movement is tracked in real time on the map, allowing the user to easily orient himself or herself with the EWL area, knowing which direction to move closer to the EWL area and indicating when the individual is inside the EWL area. As the user moves outside of the EWL area, the app will notify the user by vibrating the mobile device.

The user's movement is tracked in real time on the map, allowing them to easily orient themselves with the EWL area.

VAntage will launch in mid- to late September and will be available for free from the App Store and Google Play store. Once downloaded, there is no need to set up an account or register. The user simply opens the app and enters the locate request number. If the locate request contains EWL data, the EWL area will appear on the map juxtaposed with the user's location. Users can then determine where the excavation area is by tracking their movement on the map – no need to read lengthy descriptions of excavation areas or even to compare a map on a computer in a vehicle with the area in which they are located.

If cell and internet connectivity in an area is limited, or even nonexistent, the user can search locate requests by area on the map prior to arrival and download the EWL data so it is available upon arrival at the site.

With VAntage, locators will find new efficiencies to fully take advantage of EWL data on locate requests. Excavators will be able to ensure the EWL area they have entered into a locate request is accurate and aligns with their excavation areas. And, per Chris's request, damage investigators will have a tool to easily determine if a damage has occurred inside or outside a defined excavation area on a locate request.



811 FAST FACTS

CHANNEL	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
PHONE	290,289	24.66%
WEB	886,712	75.34%

Total YTD 2026
1,177,001



Investing in Team Member Well-Being Dealing with Stress, Pressure and Burnout

- Kip D. Burlew | Head of Talent

Virginia 811's commitment to safety extends beyond protecting the people we serve. It also means creating a workplace where team members have the knowledge, resources, and support they need to care for their own well-being.

Every day, our team members make a difference at Virginia 811 through their service to the public and to one another. That responsibility requires focus, resilience, and a genuine commitment to others. At the same time, we recognize that the demands of meaningful work can bring stress and pressure—and, when those challenges go unaddressed, can contribute to burnout.

To support our team members, we recently created and provided a training video, **Dealing with Stress, Pressure and Burnout**, for all team members to watch. The training offers practical information to help individuals recognize the signs of stress, pressure, and burnout, understand how these experiences can affect personal and professional well-being, and identify healthy strategies for responding to them.

This initiative reflects an important part of our broader approach to team member development and organizational safety: well-being is an essential component of a healthy, resilient, and high-performing workforce. By giving team members practical tools and encouraging awareness of these challenges, we can help our people sustain their effectiveness while maintaining balance in their lives.

For our organization, investing in well-being is also an investment in the quality of service we provide to our customers and communities. Team members who feel supported and equipped to manage challenges are better positioned to serve others, collaborate with their teammates, and uphold the standards that define our organization.

We are proud of the dedication our team members demonstrate every day, and we remain committed to providing resources that support them both professionally and personally. Dealing with Stress, Pressure and Burnout is one example of that commitment—and an important reminder that caring for our people is an integral part of caring for the organization and the communities we serve.

Transmission Price Update



Following approval by the Virginia 811 Board of Directors in June 2026, the transmission price will increase by **\$0.04 effective January 1, 2027**, bringing the price per transmission to **\$1.24**.

We appreciate your continued partnership and remain committed to providing reliable service, innovative tools, and strong support to Virginia's damage prevention community. If you have any questions about this update, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Operations Summer Training Update Strengthening the Fundamentals

- Diana Stokes | Manager of Operations

Over the past couple of months, the Operations team has continued to focus on strengthening the skills and processes that are essential to providing accurate, consistent, and safe service to our stakeholders.

Recent training sessions have included a refresher on collecting contact information, with team members reviewing procedures and working documents, followed by opportunities for coaching through live monitoring.

Training has also placed a strong emphasis on mapping and verification, including addressed, non-addressed, and GPS coordinate requests.

Another key area of focus has been the importance of asking the necessary questions, obtaining customer confirmation, and ensuring the proposed excavation description matches the area being mapped. Sessions also reinforced the importance of verbally verifying information entered on the locate request and completing the final verification process before submitting the request.

These summer training sessions are designed not only as refreshers, but as opportunities to reinforce good habits, sharpen skills, and maintain the high level of accuracy and safety our work requires.

Thank you to everyone for your participation, engagement,
and continued commitment to learning and improvement!

Recognizing Excellence

The Virginia 811 Golden Shovel Award

Dina Kimball

2026 2nd Quarter Golden Shovel Award

Please join us in congratulating **Dina Kimball**, recipient of Virginia 811's **2026 Second Quarter Golden Shovel Award!**

Dina has been part of Virginia 811 since 2002 and currently serves as Web Ticket Quality Coordinator. As one of the organization's longest-tenured team members, she has played an important role in Virginia 811's growth and continues to make a meaningful impact through her knowledge, experience and dedication to damage prevention.

Dina is a trusted resource for her extensive knowledge of Virginia damage prevention law and her ability to handle even challenging customer situations with patience, professionalism and expertise. She is also always willing to share that knowledge with her teammates, offering guidance, answering questions and stepping in when help is needed.



“Dina’s knowledge, dedication and willingness to help others make a lasting impact on our team and Virginia 811.”

That commitment was especially evident during the Exactix transition, when Dina worked countless overtime hours to help the WTQC team navigate one of the organization's biggest operational changes. Even after implementation, she has continued to be a go-to resource for her team as they work through the system and its connection to the broader damage prevention mission.

Perhaps one of Dina's greatest contributions is the perspective she brings from more than two decades with Virginia 811. Her experience, resilience and willingness to help have earned the respect of her colleagues, and her candor and quick wit make her someone people naturally turn to for advice and perspective.

Dina is one of the people who helped shape Virginia 811 into the organization it is today, and her continued commitment to quality, teamwork and damage prevention excellence makes this recognition especially well deserved.

Congratulations, Dina, on this well-deserved recognition and thank you for your many years of dedication to Virginia 811!



Team Members Celebrating Their Service to Virginia 811 This Quarter

Marty Mitchem 7/13/2002 24 Years of Service	Krystin Fahnley 7/1/2024 2 Years of Service	Tamara Carter 9/8/2025 1 Year of Service
Garry Finley 9/29/2004 22 Years of Service	Roy Lax 7/1/2024 2 Years of Service	Stephanie “Fergie” Ferguson 9/8/2025 1 Year of Service
Amanda Cottrell 8/11/2017 9 Years of Service	Mark Mullins 7/1/2024 2 Years of Service	Matthew Lewis 9/8/2025 1 Year of Service
Jerry Altice 7/29/2019 7 Years of Service	Cera Wadsworth 7/1/2024 2 Years of Service	Tyler Morrison 9/8/2025 1 Year of Service
Fernando Mendez 9/2/2020 6 Years of Service	Kip Burlew 8/26/2024 2 Years of Service	Crystal Tice 9/22/2025 1 Year of Service
Kimberly Swope 9/8/2020 6 Years of Service	Brandon Massenburg 7/7/2025 1 Year of Service	
Shana Linthicum 7/14/2021 5 Years of Service	Adriana Butler 9/8/2025 1 Year of Service	

96 Years of Combined Virginia 811 Experience
THANK YOU FOR YOUR YEARS OF SERVICE



New Roles.

Expanded Support.

Virginia 811 is excited to announce several new roles within our Public Awareness and Training team, effective September 1, 2026.



Frank Giannini
Manager of Learning & Development

Frank will lead learning and development initiatives, including training, onboarding, annual education and our biannual damage prevention conference.



Fernando Mendez
Public Awareness Supervisor

Fernando will lead our Regional Public Awareness Liaisons and oversee public awareness planning, outreach and coverage across the Commonwealth.



Kennedy McCullough
Public Awareness & Social Media Specialist

Kennedy will lead social media and digital outreach, track engagement and performance, and coordinate statewide membership, town hall and other meetings.

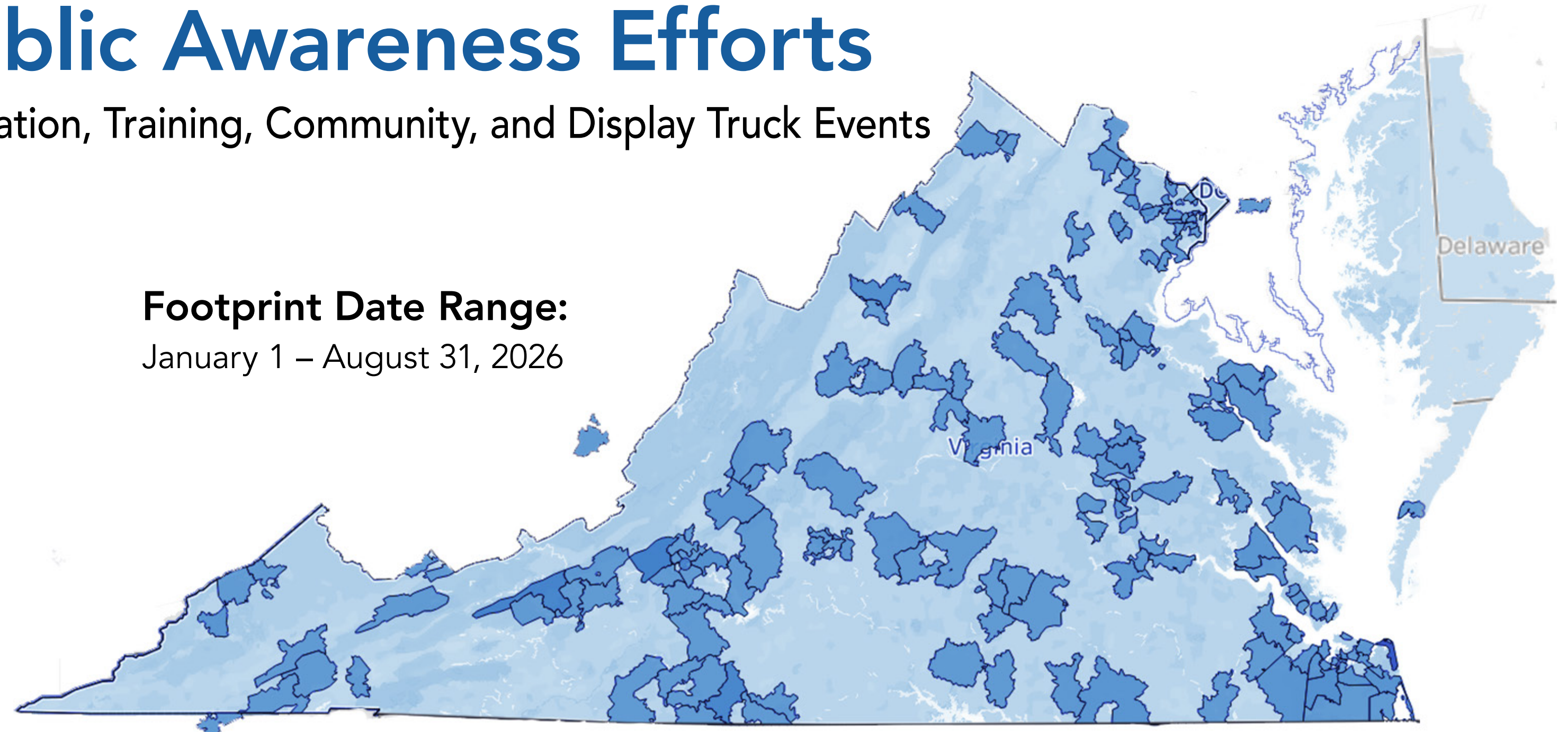
Please join us in congratulating Frank and Fernando on their new roles and welcoming Kennedy as an official member of the Virginia 811 team!

Virginia 811

Public Awareness Efforts

Education, Training, Community, and Display Truck Events

Footprint Date Range:
January 1 – August 31, 2026



Attendance by Event Type

Event Type	Attendees
Display Truck	123,630
Public Awareness	79,562
Training	2,842

Public Awareness Events

127

Training Events

133

Truck Events

119

Events by Language



Language
■ English
■ Spanish

Events by Format



Format
■ In-person
■ Virtual

Items Distributed by Month



Virginia 811 Celebrates 811 Day Across the Commonwealth

Virginia 811 once again embraced the spirit of 811 Day, celebrating throughout August with events, partnerships and community outreach that brought the safe digging message to Virginians across the Commonwealth. From baseball stadiums and community events to worksite visits and display truck stops, our team found new ways to engage people while reinforcing the importance of contacting Virginia 811 before every digging project.

This year, Virginia 811 partnered with **Columbia Gas** and **Dominion Energy** to bring the 811 message to fans at the Richmond Flying Squirrels game, while **Columbia Gas** joined us in sponsoring a Tides game in Hampton Roads. Virginia 811 also continued its sponsorship with the Salem RidgeYaks, bringing safe digging awareness to baseball fans in Southwest Virginia.

Our display truck was also on the move throughout Hampton Roads, making stops at work locations to deliver pizza, drinks and Virginia 811 swag to crews in the field. These visits provided an opportunity to thank the people working to build and maintain our communities while reminding them that safe digging starts with contacting 811.

From the ballpark to the jobsite, this year's 811 Day activities helped us connect with thousands of Virginians in memorable ways and continue building awareness of the importance of protecting underground utilities.

Thank you to all of our partners, teams and communities who helped us make 811 Day a success!



A Partnership That Helps Put 811 on the Table

Every August, Virginia 811 partners with **Papa Johns Pizza of Hampton Roads** to help spread the safe digging message during 811 Day - and this annual partnership gives us a unique way to reach people right where they live and gather.

Throughout the month, Papa Johns allows Virginia 811 to place over **26,000 safe digging message toppers on pizza boxes** across Hampton Roads, putting the 811 message directly in front of customers. They also provide a 25% off promotional code, giving customers another reason to celebrate 811 Day while supporting a business that supports damage prevention.

It's more than a pizza promotion. Papa Johns is helping Virginia 811 extend the reach of the safe digging message into local communities, year after year.

We're grateful for their continued partnership and encourage our Hampton Roads Members and stakeholders to support and thank Papa Johns for helping us remind more people: Contact 811 before you dig.

Thank you for your partnership Papa Johns!





Virginia 811 Exactix Bootcamps Connect Stakeholders with the People, Tools and Resources They Need

Since the transition to Exactix, questions about the system, mapping, member responsibilities, resources and day-to-day operations continue to come up across the damage prevention community. The Virginia 811 Exactix Bootcamp is helping bring those questions - and the people who can answer them - together.

The Bootcamp brings utilities, excavators, locators and other stakeholders together with Virginia 811 subject matter experts for an interactive morning of learning and conversation. Participants can ask questions directly, learn how to navigate Exactix, discover available resources and training, and gain a better understanding of how their role connects to the larger 811 process.

The real value comes from having everyone in the same room. Questions that might otherwise require reaching out to multiple teams can be addressed together, while participants also learn from the experiences and questions of others in the industry. The result is a better understanding of Exactix and how the system works for everyone involved.

Virginia 811 held Exactix Bootcamps in **Chester on May 27** and **Hampton on July 23**, giving stakeholders in those areas an opportunity to connect, learn and get answers directly from the Virginia 811 team.

Want to bring an Exactix Bootcamp to your area?

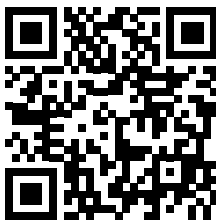
Contact Virginia 811 to learn more or request a Bootcamp for your region.



CoRE-EX and Excavator Programs

Hosted by local pipeline and gas distribution companies, these programs address critical damage prevention initiatives specific to excavators. Investing time in either training is the best way to learn current safe digging practices.

Virginia Beach 9/8/2026 5:30 PM	Culpeper 9/22/2026 5:30 PM	Roanoke 10/7/2026 11:00 AM
Smithfield 9/9/2026 5:30 PM	Harrisonburg 9/23/2026 5:30 PM	Blacksburg 10/8/2026 5:30 PM
Emporia 9/10/2026 5:30 PM	Ruckersville 9/24/2026 5:30 PM	Abingdon 10/13/2026 5:30 PM
Colonial Heights 9/14/2026 5:30 PM	Louisa 9/29/2026 5:30 PM	Lebanon 10/14/2026 5:30 PM
Sandston 9/15/2026 11:00 AM	Lynchburg 9/30/2026 5:30 PM	Norton 0/15/2026 5:30 PM
Fredericksburg 9/16/2026 5:30 PM	South Boston 10/1/2026 5:30 PM	
Manassas 9/17/2026 11:00 AM	Martinsville 10/6/2026 5:30 PM	



Register to attend or scan the QR Code:
<https://va.pipeline-awareness.com>



2026 Excavator Survey & Town Hall

As part of Virginia 811’s strategic plan and commitment to continuous improvement, we conduct a stakeholder survey and town hall every two years, focusing on a different stakeholder group.

This year, we’re asking our **Excavator community to share feedback** on Virginia 811’s processes, technology and services. Look for the survey coming your way in the next few weeks. Your feedback will help shape the conversation during our virtual Excavator Town Hall.

Virtual Excavator Town Hall
Wednesday | September 30, 2026
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

We hope you’ll take a few minutes to complete the survey, and we look forward to seeing you at the virtual Town Hall!

For survey and registration details, visit:

<https://VA811.com/Event/Excavator-Town-Hall-3/>



Celebrating a True Damage Prevention Ambassador

Congratulations Ricky Poe!

For nearly 40 years, **Ricky Poe** has been part of Virginia's gas and damage prevention community. This year, his dedication to educating others and promoting safe digging earned him the **Virginia 811 Damage Prevention Ambassador Award**.

Ricky began his career in the gas industry in 1987, working in construction and service. In 2011, he became a Damage Prevention Specialist with Atmos, where he found an opportunity to educate excavators, municipalities and Atmos employees about the importance of following Virginia's Damage Prevention Act.

Since then, Ricky has taken that message just about everywhere.

He attended PTA meetings at elementary schools, state baseball tournaments in Southwest Virginia, events at Bristol International Raceway and even set up at Lowe's to cook and hand out 811 literature. His daughter, Makenna, joined him at many of those events and eventually learned enough from listening to her dad that she could quote the Damage Prevention Act herself.

"I wanted to get the message out about contacting 811 to any event I could participate at," Ricky said.

Ricky has also been a familiar face at General Membership meetings, Advisory Committee meeting, SCC events and throughout the damage prevention community.

One lesson Ricky learned during his career was that he couldn't prevent every damage. "I had to focus my efforts on the things I could control," he said. His advice

to anyone entering the damage prevention field is equally straightforward: **know and understand the law so you can answer questions accurately when you're in the field.**

Ricky will retire at the end of February 2027 after 40 years in the gas industry. As he looks toward retirement, he says he hopes people remember his work as **"always being honest and fair."**

“I’ve met and become close friends with so many people in the industry, with the same goal as mine... keeping everyone safe and to protect their infrastructure!”

He credits the many people who supported his efforts - including Vanessa Payne, Steve Light and his good friend Pat Wilson - and says the relationships he has built over the years are one of the things he will miss most.

He'll also have plenty to keep him busy. Ricky plans to spend more time fishing and hunting and is building a small campground for family and friends on his property along the North Fork Holston River.



United Cities Gas Company Construction Crew Circa 1990-91
Bonham Rd Bristol VA

Back Row: Bud Eaton, Steve Woolley, JR Sproles, Roger Musick, Randall Ball, Jim Hutton, Bob Shelley, Ricky Poe, Doug Ingle, Craig Worley, Jeffrey Barker, Bob Hall

Front Row: Tim Eaton, Nickey Barker, Leland VanHoy, Stanley Canter, Jackie Leonard, Jeff Goodpasture, Roger Crigger, David Hall, Gary Sullivan



Congratulations, Ricky, on this well-deserved honor - and thank you for a career spent sharing the 811 message, educating others and helping make Virginia safer.

Permit Projects Need 811 First



Virginia 811’s Permit Office Campaign is gaining momentum, with 811 safety materials now available in permit offices across the Commonwealth. What started as an effort to put important excavation and demolition information directly in the hands of people obtaining permits is continuing to grow through partnerships with local permit offices, LDPC members and municipal partners.

Virginia 811 provides participating offices with a **brochure holder and safety handouts**, and our liaisons work with local offices to get the materials in place and answer questions along the way.

[Download Printable PDF HERE](#)

Participating permit offices currently include:

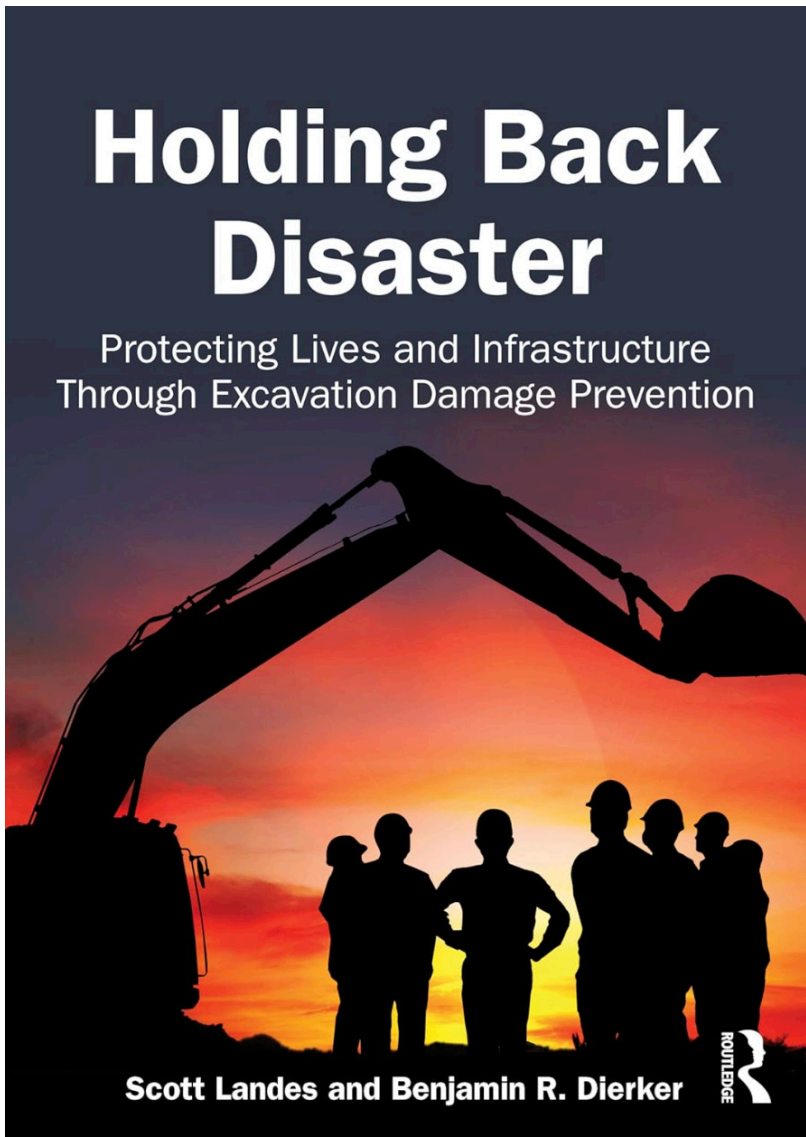
- Henrico
- Charlottesville
- Daleville
- Appomattox
- Lynchburg
- Bedford
- Vinton
- Radford
- Blacksburg
- Christiansburg
- Roanoke County
- Roanoke City
- Fairfax
- Leesburg
- Arlington
- Alexandria
- Stuart

Know a permit office that should be part of the campaign?

Help us keep it growing.

[Request a Permit Office Kit HERE](#)

Together, we can put 811 information where people are making plans to dig - and help make Virginia excavation ready.



New Book Examines the Future of Damage Prevention

Holding Back Disaster: Protecting Lives and Infrastructure Through Excavation Damage Prevention takes a closer look at why underground utility damage remains a national challenge - and what can be done about it. The book examines the people, technology, mapping, locating, policy and coordination behind damage prevention and explores how these pieces can work together to create a safer, more effective system.

While contacting 811 before digging remains a critical first step, damage prevention involves much more than a single phone call or ticket. The book looks at the broader system behind protecting underground infrastructure, including the challenges faced by utilities, locators, excavators, 811 centers and other stakeholders. **It also explores emerging technologies and new approaches that could help reduce damage and improve the way we protect what’s below.**

For anyone working in damage prevention, *Holding Back Disaster* offers an opportunity to step back, look at the bigger picture and consider where the industry goes from here.

Interested in the bigger picture of damage prevention?

Learn more here: <https://www.aii.org/holding-back-disaster/>



Virginia 811 Scholarship in Action

Newport News resident and 2026 Virginia 811 Scholarship recipient **Alexis Hernandez** is focused on building more than a job - he’s working toward a career that will provide stability for his family while contributing to the infrastructure that keeps Virginia communities running.

Alexis is pursuing the **Centura College Line Worker Program** and has put his scholarship to work, earning:

- **NCCER Construction Site Safety Orientation**
- **NCCER Core: Introduction to Basic Construction Skills**
- **OSHA 10-Hour Construction Outreach Training**

Alexis has worked full time since age 16 and brings experience operating specialty equipment and working in a variety of jobsite conditions. His goal is to continue gaining skills and certifications while building a meaningful career in infrastructure and utility work.

For Alexis, protecting underground utilities is more than a technical skill - it’s a responsibility. His determination to build a stable future for his family while contributing to his community is exactly the kind of potential the Virginia 811 Scholarship was created to support.

Congratulations, Alexis! We’re proud to support you as you build your career and wish you continued success.



Plan Early. Coordinate Better.

Supporting Fiber Projects from the Start

- Anita Scott | Broadband Support Specialist

Planning a fiber build involves a lot of moving pieces—timelines, permitting, contractors, utilities, locating resources and, ultimately, locate requests. Bringing the right people into the conversation early can help strengthen communication and coordination before construction begins.

Virginia 811's Broadband Support Specialists recently saw this in action during the third Virtual Broadband Coordination Roundtable with BEAD awardee iWiSP. The conversation focused on project timelines, plans and work areas, with participants asking questions and sharing information to support coordination.

When Rappahannock Electric Cooperative asked about the proposed work area, the iWiSP project manager shared project mapping to provide additional detail. Columbia Gas representatives also offered training assistance to support the iWiSP team.

The Roundtable brought project teams and utility partners together to connect, ask questions and share information before work begins. This type of early communication and collaboration is exactly what the Roundtables are designed to encourage.

The Broadband Support team works with fiber stakeholders across the Commonwealth before and during construction. Ideally, connecting with the team during the planning stages—and at a minimum, **four to six months or even earlier before construction begins**—allows time to help teams prepare, connect with others involved in the project area and identify resources that can support a smoother start.

Support is tailored to each team's needs and can include:

- Virginia Underground Utility Damage Prevention Act training
- Safe Digging and "Lessons from the Field" Locate Request Best Practices
- New company and out-of-state contractor onboarding
- Virginia 811 process education
- In-person or virtual training, including Spanish-language training
- Virtual Broadband Coordination Roundtables that bring the right people together before construction begins



Broadband Coordination Roundtable

A Virginia 811 Initiative
Plan Early. Dig Smart.

Whether you are preparing for a multi-county build, bringing new contractors into Virginia or simply want to make sure your team understands the 811 process, **don't wait until locate requests are being submitted to reach out.** Virginia 811's Broadband Support Specialists are available to support you from planning through construction.

The earlier the conversation begins, the more opportunity there is to prepare, communicate and coordinate—and together, help make Virginia excavation ready.

Have a fiber project on the horizon? Bring Virginia 811's Broadband Support Specialists into the conversation early. Contact us at BroadbandSupport@VA811.com.



Virginia 811 Celebrates Millionth Locate Request of 2026

Every year, Virginia 811 looks forward to reaching an important milestone—the one-millionth locate request of the year. In 2026, that milestone belonged to **Shentel in Edinburg, Virginia**.

Shentel submitted Virginia 811's **1,000,000th locate request of 2026**, marking an important moment for both organizations and highlighting the volume of construction and utility work taking place across the Commonwealth.

Locate requests are an important step before excavation and construction begins, helping ensure underground utilities can be identified and marked so work can move forward safely and responsibly.

To celebrate the milestone, Virginia 811 visited Shentel's operations team in Edinburg with lunch and Virginia 811 swag. The celebration provided an opportunity to thank the team for making safe digging practices part of their everyday work and for being part of this year's milestone.

Virginia 811 congratulates Shentel on becoming the 2026 millionth locate request holder and thanks its team, along with excavators and utility professionals across Virginia, for continuing to make damage prevention a priority.

One million locate requests - and counting!



Underline Quest Is Gaining Momentum

Help Us Take It Further

Since its launch earlier this year, Underline Quest has been giving communities a new way to learn about damage prevention through an interactive augmented reality experience. And recently, the game had an opportunity to reach an even broader audience.

At the Global Damage Prevention Summit in Tennessee, Virginia 811 President and CEO Scott Crawford introduced Underline Quest to damage prevention professionals from across the country. Scott shared the story behind the game—from how the idea began and what went into its development to why Virginia 811 believes interactive technology can help bring safe digging education to new audiences.

The response was encouraging.

Conference attendees had the opportunity to experience Underline Quest firsthand at our booth, where many expressed enthusiasm about the concept and its potential to engage people in a different way. Following the presentation and conference exposure, engagement with Underline Quest increased significantly and remained elevated in the weeks that followed.

The experience reinforced something we've seen since the game's launch:

When people have an opportunity to see Underline Quest, learn what it is and experience it for themselves, they want to engage with it.

And that's where the 811 community can help.

A Shared Resource for the 811 Community

Underline Quest was created as a shared resource for 811 centers and damage prevention professionals. The goal has always been to give the industry something engaging that can help bring safe digging education to new audiences—and make it easy for organizations to share that message in their own communities.

The response at the Global Damage Prevention Summit showed that the idea resonates beyond Virginia. More importantly, the continued engagement following the event shows the potential of simply getting Underline Quest in front of more people.

Exposure matters. And the 811 network has an opportunity to make a difference.

Whether you're reaching homeowners, excavators, students, contractors or your broader community, Underline Quest gives you another way to put safe digging in front of your audience.

Help Us Share the Quest

If your organization hasn't yet promoted Underline Quest, we'd love for you to join us.

We've created a Partner Promotion Kit with ready-to-use social media graphics, messaging and other materials to make sharing the game easy. You don't have to create anything from scratch—just choose the materials that work best for your audience and share the Quest.

The more organizations that introduce their communities to Underline Quest, the more opportunities we have to connect people with the importance of damage prevention.

The Quest is underway. Help us take it further.

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Three Commitments That Could Dramatically Reduce Underground Utility Damages

Damage prevention can sometimes feel extraordinarily complicated. We have statutes, regulations, best practices, tolerance zones, Positive Response codes, ticket management systems, emerging technologies, and an ever-growing amount of data. Yet beneath all that complexity, preventing damage still depends largely upon people making good decisions at the right time.

If stakeholders across the damage prevention community were willing to make three commitments, I believe we could dramatically reduce damages to underground utilities.

1 COMMIT TO PLANNING RATHER THAN REACTING

Too much of damage prevention remains reactive. Tickets are submitted at the last possible moment. Locators respond to workloads after they accumulate. Excavation schedules change without information flowing to everyone affected. When something goes wrong, we investigate the damage rather than asking what conditions existed before the damage occurred.

Damage prevention should begin well before the excavator puts a bucket in the ground—or even submits an 811 ticket.

Better planning means communicating upcoming work, submitting accurate and appropriately sized tickets, white lining excavation areas, managing locate capacity, and recognizing potential problems before they become emergencies. Technology can help us do this increasingly well, but technology cannot replace the commitment to plan.

2 COMMIT TO COMMUNICATION RATHER THAN COMPLIANCE

The law establishes minimum expectations. Successful damage prevention requires something more. It is tempting for each stakeholder to ask, “Did I do what the law required?” The excavator submitted the ticket. The operator transmitted it to the locator. The locator entered a Positive Response. Everyone completed their assigned step.

And a damage can still occur.

A better question is: **“Does everyone involved have the information they need to excavate safely?”**

That subtle change moves us from a transactional system toward a collaborative one. When an excavation cannot be marked on time, communicate. When the scope of excavation changes, communicate. When markings are unclear, communicate. When something simply does not look right in the field, stop and communicate.

The safest excavation is not necessarily the one where everyone technically complied with the law. It is the one where everyone understood what was happening.

3 COMMIT TO LEARNING RATHER THAN BLAMING

When damages occur, accountability matters. But blame and accountability are not the same thing.

Every damage is also information.

We should be relentlessly curious about what that information tells us. Why did the damage occur? Was there inaccurate information on the ticket? Were facilities difficult to locate? Were markings misunderstood? Did workload, scheduling, training, technology, or human behavior contribute? Most importantly, are we seeing patterns that could help us prevent the next damage?

That requires stakeholders to share data honestly—even when the data is uncomfortable—and resist the temptation to use statistics simply to prove that someone else is the problem.

Damage prevention ultimately depends upon excavators, utility operators, contract locators, 811 centers, regulators, and other stakeholders recognizing that none of us can prevent damages independently.

► **Plan earlier. Communicate better. Learn continuously.**

Three relatively simple commitments.

If we collectively made them, the results could be anything but simple.



This essay was written entirely by ChatGPT, a natural language generator chatbot developed by OpenAI. The prompt to which ChatGPT responded is “What are three commitments stakeholders in damage prevention could make that could dramatically reduce damages to underground utilities?”

WHEN PASSION OVERSHADOWS TRUTH

Book Review of *The Reverse Centaur's Guide to Life After AI*

- B. Scott Crawford

I firmly believe that even the worst books can always provide the reader with something valuable. There is almost always a nugget of information that can prove helpful. Unfortunately, Cory Doctorow's latest book, *The Reverse Centaur's Guide to Life After AI: How to Think about Artificial Intelligence – Before it's Too Late*, put my maxim to the ultimate test!

Doctorow, a science fiction writer and technology activist, provides an overview of the current state of AI in relation to much of the hype surrounding this technology. He contends that an AI bubble is forming as AI developers help stir hype, such as AI being able to replace people in certain industries, in order to maintain funding for AI companies. To Doctorow, the hype is unwarranted as, in his opinion, AI simply does not match what developers claim it can do. Doctorow portrays the AI industry as overpromising AI capabilities, playing on his premise that "bosses hate paying workers, more than just about anything else," in order to keep money flowing into these companies. What will eventually emerge, he argues, is the collapse of a massive financial bubble that will send us all into economic turmoil unlike any we have ever witnessed.

Unfortunately, Doctorow avoids citing any of his sources – so fact-checking is limited to Google searches and follow-up conversations with, ironically, GenAI models such as Claude. He takes partial truths, stretches them across whole industries, and presents the result as indisputable fact.

Doctorow's passion for workers' rights and his concerns about the environment and financial bubbles are admirable. However, through his rhetorical style he is creating higher levels of hype than the hype he is trying to undermine. The book is clearly written for those who already agree with his line of thought and need validation rather than for an audience that needs persuading to reexamine their feelings, thoughts, and positions on AI.

reverse centaur
[re·verse cen·taur] noun

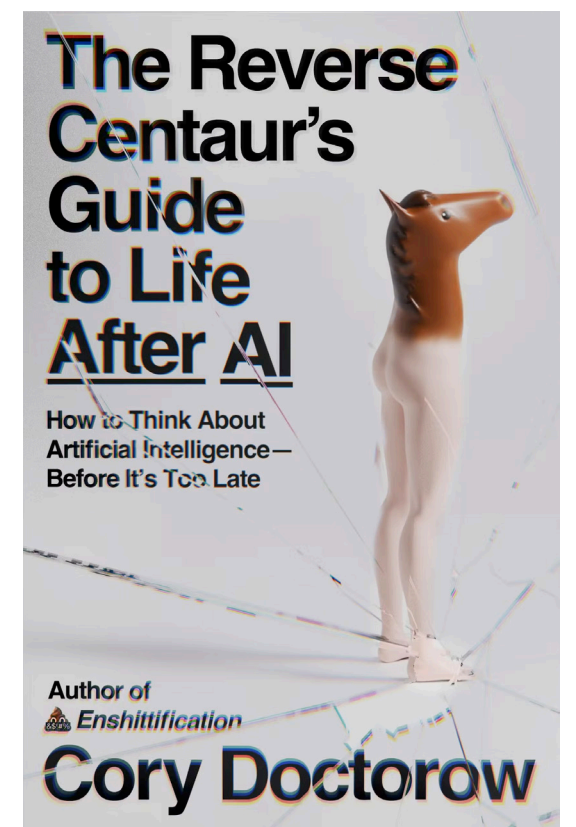
Work situation where a human is forced to act as a servant or physical appendage to a machine, working at an exhausting, relentless pace set by automation.

Where Doctorow does come close to providing that kernel of something valuable I strive to find even in the worst of books is his construct of a "reverse centaur." Constructs created to help business leaders understand the different relationships workers have with GenAI mention centaurs as individuals who use GenAI in their work but provide clear direction to models and act as the final decision-maker regarding the content generated. Doctorow's reverse centaur inverts this: the worker "is conscripted into acting as an assistant to a machine."

The term "reverse centaur," which Doctorow borrows from early-21st-century automation jargon, is asked to do more work than it can bear, adding little to the centaur construct and only partly capturing what he is trying to convey. But the machine's terms are set by people. The monitoring platform that flags a worker for falling behind is enforcing a pace management chose and can change. Doctorow reaches for Lucy and Ethel at the chocolate conveyor, yet the conveyor never set its own speed – someone off-camera turned the dial. What he frames as a relationship with the machine is a relationship with the boss, mediated by software, which makes this a question of organizational culture rather than of how we actually work alongside GenAI.

It is this breakdown in metaphor that has most excited me and given me a host of themes on which to reflect. Out of this has emerged a stronger understanding of team member–GenAI relationships, metaphor, and AI-supported organizational culture. So, in the end, Doctorow did provide a nugget of content that was thought-provoking.

I just wish, given the uncited claims and the strained central metaphor, that in the end he revealed that GenAI had written the book – that would have been quite impactful and provided evidence that GenAI is limited in its capabilities and humans should not be too worried about AI taking their jobs. Sadly, no such claim was advanced. The work was written by a human.





Passion to Serve,
Dedication to Safety.