



## George J. Igel & Co., Inc.

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Ohio Senate Transportation Committee  
House Bill 54 Testimony  
Mary Logan So, Vice President of Safety and Employee Development  
March 13, 2025

Chair Patton, Vice-Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the issue of abandoned lines. My name is Mary Logan So, and I'm vice president of safety and employee development for the George J. Igel & Co., Inc. Igel is a heavy civil contractor located in Columbus, Ohio since 1911.

The potential risks related to utilities is one of the greatest safety issues facing contractors today. I have worked in construction safety for more than 20 years. I currently represent Ohio contractors on the OHIO811 board, am an active participant on the Ohio Utilities Damage Prevention Coalition and co-chair the Abandoned Lines subcommittee there. Let me provide some context.

Less than a mile from here, Igel worked on a roadway job when a pipe crew struck a 4-inch, unmarked gas line. We followed best practices and called in the damage to OHIO811. Upon responding to the damage, Igel was informed it was an abandoned line. So, we were directed to continue, but the information given wasn't accurate. While the 4-inch was abandoned, another unmarked, 2-inch gas line has been fed through the new one.

We were a contractor in a Central Ohio suburb widening a road, building a park, and building a walking bridge for students to access the shopping center area nearby. The project was regularly marked by utility locators. The locator was performing straight-line marking what was on the drawings, but unknown to Igel, gas relocations had taken place, so the new utilities were not getting marked at all; the locators didn't even have the correct drawings. Igel vacuum excavated and protected the unmarked line for nearly a year. To ensure we knew its location, we had a survey crew come out and took GPS points to note its location. We distributed the information and updated our drawings to avoid damages.

So, imagine the panic and shock when we hit a unmarked gas line in the intersection just beyond the driveway to the school campus. If it hadn't been Spring Break, the emergency response would have led to preventing access to the campus or the need to evacuate staff and students.

Igel was excavating to build a parking garage on Front St. when an operator hit an unmarked, 2-inch gas line. I remember the phone call on our Incident Line from a panicked superintendent and the decision to call 9-1-1. It was Friday in downtown Columbus. First responders shut down the roads nearby and re-routed traffic. It turned out the 2-inch "abandoned" line was being fed from a 16-inch main. Gas blew for over four hours. One of the contractors performing the repair said the line would risk four city blocks had they not been able to get it safely under control.

Crews performed a pre-dig at the airport and uncovered an unmarked, 4-inch steel gas line just outside the fence line on the south side of International Gateway. Again, we called OHIO811 to have facility owners come onsite and confirm ownership. No one claimed it. In fact, we were told it was likely abandoned. In

conflict with the work, we were instructed to “go through it.” The “assumed” facility owner refused to tap it. We refused to tap it. Work in this area was delayed a month before Igel paid a third-party to have it tapped at our own expense while being berated for causing delays. It immediately began blowing and had to be sleeved for safety. Later, we learned it was residual gas that blew. But it was enough gas to injure the crew.

It’s not just with a bucket. An Igel concrete crew was performing tunnel repairs on a university campus. We had a valid locate ticket. The proper notifications had been made. So imagine the unsuspecting concrete crew in a darkened tunnel jackhammering. Our employees inside that tunnel were jackhammering. They reported it sounded like a microwave exploding. They ran out of the tunnel confused to see students and staff streaming out of buildings. The employee jackhammering kept complaining about pain in his shoulder. They stripped him of his shirt and could see nothing. He didn’t feel well and we took him to the hospital. As more information came to light, we discovered that he jackhammered into an unmarked, electric line shutting down power to four campus buildings and sending an electric shock circulating through his body. The doctors told us that the rubber handles on the jackhammer likely saved his life. When I sat in a trailer the next day taking witness statements of the rest of the crew who worked in that tunnel, their voices shook. One employee cried because the injured employee had just taken over for him. He kept saying, “It should have been me.”

A pipe crew was working on another university job, this time in Athens. On an unrelated project, another contractor was abandoning gas lines on behalf of a facility owner. We could see them do the work. Igel crews literally had to wait because a four-foot section of the 8-inch, steel, “abandoned facility” had to be removed for the installation of a manhole on the university project. Two weeks after “abandonment,” Igel was told by the facility owner it was safe to remove the portion in conflict with the job. The line, still in the ground was cut and capped with a boot on both ends. After receiving both verbal and written confirmation that the line had been purged and abandoned, an Igel foreman entered the trench, took a partner saw and made a cut through the line. On the second cut, the building pressure literally shot fire out one end of the facility. Two nearby employees literally dove into a trench to avoid injury.

We were lucky. Again. But here’s the thing, I’m not a believer in luck because luck runs out.

There are humans in these stories, who live, and work, and raise kids here in Ohio. Legislation for abandoned facilities is not cutting edge, and there are many, many issues facing how to mindfully move forward toward a safer excavation process in Ohio. Trying to maintain records of abandonment, create safe practices to purge utilities, prevent abandoned facilities from being used as conduits to new installations, exchange information on how to safely confirm if a utility is “live” or “dead” are not issues we can resolve quickly. It requires commitment.

I have co-chaired the Abandoned Lines subcommittee for the Ohio Utilities Damage Prevention Coalition since its inception in September 2018. And it was no small task to get stakeholders to the table; we struggle today to get some stakeholders to even attend, or send the right representative and decision maker. We have tried to weigh safety, cost, schedule and productivity. We’ve evaluated language from other states. We continue to meet today. I understand all too well that if we cannot set aside our own personal agendas, we’re going to hurt someone. It is my every hope that House Bill 54 causes the decision makers with each stakeholder to come to the table so we can make construction projects safer for employees, the motoring public and those who call Ohio home.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.