

BC 1 Call: a contractor's first line of defense against the dangers of hidden infrastructure

The list of infrastructure buried in the province's soil continues to expand: gas utilities, electric wiring, fibre optics, water pipes, sewer pipes and a century of half-forgotten historic utility artifacts. Disturbing them can result in injury, fatality, damages to property, environmental emergencies and utility interruptions. Wouldn't it be nice to find out what's hiding below grade before you excavate?

For 30 years, BC 1 Call has been positioned as a source of that information, growing from five original members to more than 360 private and public sector underground infrastructure owners today.

Contractors can register with BC 1 Call and [submit a locate ticket](#) at no cost, through a [service link](#) 24/7. They can also call a toll-free telephone number — 1-800-474-6886 — from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. PT, Monday to Friday, excluding holidays.

Contractors should be prepared to provide the following details for a locate request:

- Your name and contact information
- The exact location of your planned excavation or ground disturbance
- How deep you will be digging
- When you plan to begin work
- Whether you are digging on public or private property, or both
- Where, on the property, you will be digging

BC 1 Call will immediately notify all members with assets at risk of the request. Contractors are advised to wait until they hear back from all of the listed members who have been notified.

"Members will search their entire infrastructure records, some of which still require manual searching, before responding directly to the requester," says Chris Hyland, President of BC 1 Call. "They will typically respond with safe digging information within three business days — five for large projects — so it's important to plan ahead. But with advances in digital mapping and process automation, many members are able to provide responses in non-complex situations within hours, not days."

The use of BC 1 Call is expanding yearly in the construction community, in large part due to emphasis by the sector on its use. The BC Construction Safety Alliance (BCCSA) is one of more than 40 BC 1 Call education partners who refer to the service in their training courses.

Contractors represent 30% of BC 1 Call's registered users, but place 66% of all locate requests. The service has grown from 20,661 registered contractors in 2021 to more than 39,000 at the start of 2024. BC 1 Call processed more than 151,000 contractor locate requests in 2023.

BC 1 Call also makes it easy to onboard and educate construction users, offering [member resources](#) that include webinars, tutorials and toolbox talk guides aimed at the industry.

The BCCSA is a member of the BC Common Ground Alliance (BCCGA), which offers [resources](#) to help contractors prevent damage to underground infrastructure.

"We consider BC 1 Call to be an indispensable tool for contractors performing excavation," says Lui Garcea, Director, Marketing and Partnerships with the BCCSA. "As members of the BCCGA we strive to ensure the safety of workers who perform work around underground infrastructure. Each April we promote Safe Digging Month and the importance of contacting BC 1 Call before you dig. That's the critical first step we want contractors to remember and act on all year long."