

Executive Summary

An underground utility line is damaged **every six minutes** nationwide by someone digging without first calling 811 according to the Common Ground Alliance (CGA), a national association dedicated to preventing damage to underground facilities. Alarming, the CGA also found more than half of homeowners feel it's unnecessary to call 811. So how do utilities change that mindset?

Electric utilities have a crucial responsibility to protect their underground infrastructure. Failure to do so can jeopardize reliability and lead to costly damages. It also can prove deadly for the customer or contractor who digs into an energized cable.

We Energies tried a fresh and friendly approach to raise awareness about safe digging. Instead of the typical “dial before you dig” reminders, the company engaged customers in a unique contest on social media by inviting customers to submit photos of their dogs digging in the yard, and then asking the public to vote for the winner. The winner would be crowned as a canine safety ambassador, helping spread an important message: ***Doggone it! Call 811 before you dig.***

The campaign quickly became the company's most successful social media effort to date, reaching more than 40,000 people on Facebook alone. Traffic to the company's blog increased 2,100 percent, and more than 2,000 people voted in the online contest. Tens of thousands of television viewers also heard the safety message with all four Milwaukee TV stations mentioning the campaign multiple times. And customer calls to 811 increased three percent in the last two quarters of 2016 compared to the same timeframe in 2015.

It is We Energies' pleasure to present this application for EEI's Advocacy Excellence Award.