



Natural gas piping damaged during cleanout operations



A sewer line penetrated by natural gas piping

While natural gas pipeline incidents are uncommon, sewer lateral work can accidentally cause leaks, fires or explosions.

Background

Utilities install underground lines using trenchless technology known as directional boring. This piping installation method has minimal impact on the surrounding area and minimizes environmental disruption. Most utility companies use directional boring for installation of underground conduits and piping, including cable, electrical and natural gas.

Before beginning directional boring, Nicor Gas follows the proper procedures for determining and marking other underground infrastructure, including sewer laterals. After existing utility lines are marked, we are required to hand dig and find these lines before we bore.

Unfortunately, there are times when sewer lines are not identified and our pipe is “pulled” through existing infrastructure leaving the opportunity for accidental damage in the future.

POTENTIAL DANGER!

The presence of a utility line in a sewer line (“cross bore”) can go undetected for months, even years. Eventually, a sewer backup may develop and you may be called to remove the blockage.

While it is common practice for you to use a mechanical rotary device to root out the blockage, this process can damage a utility line that was bored through the sewer line and cause a natural gas leak, electrocution or loss of service.

What You Can Do To Stay Safe

Before working on a sewer lateral, some steps should be taken to prevent damage to the infrastructure:

- Call JULIE—811—to have utility infrastructure in the area properly identified.
- Use a camera to determine if the sewer lateral is obstructed by other infrastructure.
- Inquire if there has been a natural gas line or other utility recently installed or upgraded on the property.

While you’re working, be mindful to look for signs of a natural gas leak:

- **LOOK** for blowing dirt or continued bubbling in standing water.
- **LISTEN** for a hissing or roaring sound.
- **SMELL** for the distinctive, rotten egg odor associated with natural gas.

You should take action any time you detect even a small amount of the odor in the air.

If you believe you have damaged a natural gas line in a sewer lateral:

- **LEAVE** the area immediately.
- **AVOID** touching anything that may cause a spark. This includes starting a car engine or using cell phones, lighters, matches, cigarettes, flashlights, light switches or landlines.
- **CALL 911** or the local natural gas utility once you are out of the area of the suspected leak and in a safe place.

Stay away from the area until emergency personnel indicate that it is safe to return.