

## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **CALL OKIE CHARACTER CHANGES WITH TIMES BUT MESSAGE REMAINS**

#### **One call can save lives, property, costly delays, call 1-800-522-OKIE before you dig**

In 1979 a simply sketched critter nicknamed OKIE became the identifying force for a new organization dedicated to stopping accidental damage of underground cables and lines. Those with plans to excavate were urged to call him before digging so that the buried facilities could be marked. Now, more than 20 years later, the little stick figure has evolved into a friendly gopher, complete with hardhat, a shovel resting on his shoulder and a cell phone in hand.

Many people couldn't tell if he was a squirrel, a beaver, or a rodent. We wanted something that wouldn't scare people, so we decided to make OKIE friendlier and we also decided he was a gopher, a ground digger", said David Bradley, Public Education Damage Prevention Council Manager. The Oklahoma One-Call Damage Prevention Councils reflect the counties in the six designated "countries" in the state: Frontier, Great Plains, Green, Kiamichi, Lake & Trail and Red Carpet countries.

The One-Call system was formed to prevent damage to underground facilities: the lines, cables, pipes, sewer and waterlines below the surface. Seven companies came together to fund a statewide one-call notification center in Oklahoma City.

"We've grown from 7 members back then to 750 today; a tremendous period of growth," said Doug MacMillan, Executive Director of Oklahoma One-Call System.

"And that growth has brought changes in the way we operate. We're using more technology to do our work. In fact, we now have a way for people to log on to our Web site [www.callokie.com](http://www.callokie.com) to request their property or job site be marked for underground facilities," MacMillan said.

"We are promoting our message to call OKIE at 1-800-522-OKIE before you plan to dig and our new OKIE will help us do it. We now have a real live OKIE mascot and you'll see him at state fairs, athletic and civic events across Oklahoma," MacMillan added.

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“Careless digging causes disruption of vital services and environmental damage---even injury or loss of life. One simple free call can mean the difference, MacMillan said.

Safe digging starts when you call OKIE at 1-800-522-6543, but that’s not where it ends. It’s just the first step in an ongoing process that requires everyone’s cooperation, responsiveness and good judgment.

Evidence suggests that damage to underground utilities is avoided about 98 percent of the time when advance notice is given by the person who calls before digging.

“Many people looking across their lawns or property, searching for the right place for that new tree or that new fence, might think it looks like a simple job, just dig. But below that surface, and some times not very far below, there are gas lines, telecommunications cables, electric lines and water mains. These are the things you don’t want to hit,” according to MacMillan.

After the call to OKIE is made, and within 48 hours, owners of underground facilities will mark their lines so you’ll know where they are and where you can dig safely. This service is totally free, even the phone call 1-800-522-6543 is free.

“Everyday across the United States careless digging causes far-reaching consequences from serious personal injury, environmental damage to costly delays. A simple call to OKIE could eliminate all of these,” MacMillan said.