



Wisconsin Damage Prevention Council

Minutes of the January 18, 2024 WI DPC Meeting

The meeting began with introductions and the floor was then opened to any participants who may have updates or questions.

Nic Alberson, from the Chippewa Valler Electric Coop, asked if it would be beneficial to maintain records and provide them to a centralized source on the specific ticket or utility locate issues experienced in the field. Mr. Alberson asked if that data could be used to support proposed changes, if questions were to arise regarding how often problems occur. Mike Meyer, from Diggers Hotline, said he thought it could not hurt to maintain those records, especially given legislative changes could be proposed and that information could be useful to paint the picture for lawmakers as to the extent of the problems.

Bob Welch, from the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors, informed the group that Brian Dreesen, from USIC, reached out to him to organize a meeting with surveyors to discuss what could be done to improve locate performance on Planning tickets. Mr. Welch said the meeting was a good discussion and first step, but there are outstanding issues which still need to be addressed.

Andrew LaTona, from We Energies, said his company is initiating a pilot program regarding Planning tickets. Mr. LaTona said We Energies will now be working directly with surveyors/engineers who file Planning tickets to offer prints, define areas to be located better, and establish the specific needs like the distance between the markings. Justin Larson, from Xcel Energy, said his company will also be pursuing similar actions to work with surveyors and engineers to define the scope of what is needed for Planning tickets. Tyler Gustaveson, from USIC, said it would be beneficial for locators to be on-site with surveyors and engineers to communicate the various needs and expectations.

Mr. Meyer stated that the Diggers Hotline Board of Directors and Advisory Board had recent meetings. Both groups are discussing potential ways to improve Diggers Hotline tickets and policies, but most proposals are about reducing ticket volume and time needed to locate a ticket. Mr. LaTona followed up by explaining that We Energies is looking at ways to address their climbing utility locating costs. Mr. LaTona said they have tried to get rate increases approved to address these costs, but the PSC rejects those proposals, so there is not much more We Energies can do except address the costs in other ways. Mr. Welch said he disagreed completely that funding cannot still be sought from the PSC. Mr. Welch said We Energies should continue to push for a rate increase with the PSC, but they could do so with the backing and support of the other members of the WI DPC, if the other members were willing to support that effort.

There was then discussion about whether or not a system could be implemented which would allow the various stakeholders to submit complaints regarding problems in the field and that data be stored and

reviewed. The data could be used not only as record collection, as Mr. Alberson discussed earlier, but also education efforts if specific companies are identified frequently in these complaints. Mr. Meyer stated he believes this issue is one part of an overarching problem of data sharing. Mr. Meyer explained that a database like this can pose concerns for stakeholders due to anyone being able to file complaints about any other company, whether valid or not. The question then becomes how is this information used and who has access to it. Complaints about companies could be abused by competitors, for example. Mr. Meyer stated there is a general hesitancy to share data here in Wisconsin. He cited examples of some communication company's unwillingness to share future fiber project plans with locators, and that Wisconsin does not have a centralized damage reporting system because utilities do not want to share that information.

Mr. Meyer then asked Matthew Sweeney, from the PSC, if the PSC could require communications companies receiving federal fiber infrastructure money to provide their plans with locators. Mr. Sweeney said the PSC could not require that, but that he will be highly encouraging them to share their plans. The question was also asked about when the next round of fiber infrastructure money is being released and work expected to begin. Spencer Pannhoff, from TD&I Cable Maintenance, said the money is expected to be released in the 3rd quarter of 2024. Mr. Pannhoff said he subsequently expects the amount of work to dip slightly in 2024, but increase exponentially in 2025.

Kenneth Ceaglske, from Taylor Electric, asked if there was any way to recoup costs from excavators who file excessive or unnecessary locate requests. Mr. Meyer said it is important to note that any discussion about recouping costs will result in similar requests from all parties. For example, if excavators can be charged for their ticket filing practices, can they, in turn, charge utilities for their costs when tickets are not located on time? Mr. Welch stated these issues all fall under the umbrella of accountability and it is crucial that accountability is addressed in any WI DPC discussion about improving this utility locating issue.

Mr. Sweeney asked if it would be beneficial to reach out to more companies and grow the participation on the WI DPC. Mr. Meyer said he has been approached to talk about the WI DPC at 2 conferences. Mr. Meyer presented information about the WI DPC at the Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin conference on January 11, 2024, and will be presenting the same material at the PSC conference in February. The group was concerned that no communications companies attended the meeting. Mr. Meyer said he would work with Mr. Sweeney to discuss getting the word out to other stakeholders.

The group then decided it would be beneficial to form subcommittees to address some key concerns pertaining to utility locating. It was also decided that any of the WI DPC members can participate on as many subcommittees as they wish. It was also recommended that there be some way to keep a record of the subcommittee meetings and prevent overlapping of discussion items. Mr. Meyer volunteered to coordinate, sit in on the subcommittee meetings, and take minutes, as he is already doing for the main meetings. There were no objections to Mr. Meyer performing those duties.

Subcommittees will be tasked with discussing what is not working well in each area, what is currently working well, potential solutions which could be addressed quickly, and which ones might need more time to address. Mr. Meyer will also provide some guidance for specific discussion topics under each subcommittee heading, to help jump start discussion.

The subcommittees which will be available are: 1) Data Sharing, 2) Legislation, 3) Training and Resources. Mr. Meyer will solicit subcommittee members with the emailing of the meeting minutes.

The next meeting will be Thursday February 22, 2024 at 1pm. The PSC has volunteered again to host the meeting at their office in Madison. Specific location information and online option will be sent at a later time. Xcel Energy also volunteered to be a satellite location for the meeting if DPC members in the western part of the state would like to attend in person.