

# HOMES

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## Mike Holmes: Dig unsafely and you could endanger the whole neighbourhood



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As landscaping season begins, homeowners are reminded to call ahead of digging to locate underground all utility lines.

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How many times have you picked up a shovel adding a garden or planting a tree? Did you know?

Most people don't know they're supposed to call before doing any kind of digging on their property to make sure they don't hit a gas line, or electric wires.

April is Safe Digging Month and that reminds us all — homeowners and contractors — why we need to call or click before we dig — at

any time of the year.

A system of cables and utility lines runs underground. Sometimes these lines and cables are buried deep below, sometimes not. The risk is too big and it's way too easy to hit an underground line if you don't know where they are; just nicking one can cause problems.

What's the risk? For one, you could get seriously hurt. In some cases, it can even cause death.

If you hit a gas line it could cause a leak, and that's very, very dangerous. All it takes is one spark and there can be a major explosion. The entire area must be evacuated and the gas shut off.

If you hit an electrical line you could be electrocuted. I've heard and read the stories, and they will scare the you-know-what out of you. People have lost limbs, suffered brain damage, severe burns and/or died because they hit an underground electrical line.

You could also cause property damage — not just to your own but also your neighbours' or the city's. Hitting a water line could cause a flood, or hitting a sewer line could lead to contamination. Then guess who's stuck with the damages and repair bill? You are. Some homeowners might even face legal action.

Don't be a headline. If you are planning any kind of work that requires digging, get someone to come to your property and mark where all the underground utility lines are located.

If you're hiring someone else, like a landscaper, to do the work, don't assume they've done their homework and called the necessary people to figure out where the underground lines are. Ask them!

If they did call, you should see different coloured flags or spray-painted markings, or both, on the property. The different colours are for different lines. For example, red is for electric or hydro lines, orange for cable and telephone lines, and yellow is for oil and steam. Don't dig on the markings. You must dig manually (ie without the help of mechanical equipment) within one metre of where the markings are.

If you see a neighbour digging on their property ask them, "Did you call before you started digging?" It might feel like you're poking your nose in their business but you're not. It's your business too, and you could be helping them avoid a major catastrophe.

If you don't know who to call, visit [clickbeforeyoudig.com](http://clickbeforeyoudig.com). Select the province you or your contractor will be digging in and it will indicate who you need to contact. You might have to contact the utility provider directly or a one-call service, like BC One Call or Ontario One Call. In some cases, you'll need to contact both the one-call service and utility providers.

Locating underground utility lines is a free service, so there's no excuse not to call. Just plan your landscaping projects ahead of time and call at least one week in advance. Make it right and dig safe.

*Watch Mike Holmes on Holmes Makes It Right on HGTV. For more information visit [makeitright.ca](http://makeitright.ca).*

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