

IN THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT FOR PLYMOUTH COUNTY

STATE OF IOWA, ex rel., THOMAS J.)
MILLER, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF)
IOWA (99AG23112),)
)
Plaintiff,)
)
vs.)
)
PATRICK DEROCHER and CYNTHIA)
DEROCHER, d/b/a DEROCHER)
CONSTRUCTION,)
)
Defendants.)

LAW NO. _____

PETITION AT LAW

COMES NOW Plaintiff State of Iowa, ex rel., Thomas J. Miller, Attorney General of Iowa, and for claim against Defendants Patrick DeRocher and Cynthia DeRocher, d/b/a DeRocher Construction, states as follows:

Introduction

1. The State of Iowa seeks the assessment of civil penalties and injunctive relief against the defendants for violations of the "Iowa One Call" statute, Iowa Code chapter 480. The defendants failed to provide prior notice of excavations to the One Call Notification Center, and proceeded with the excavations without any underground facilities having been located and marked. During the excavations, the defendants' tiling plow hit and ruptured a 24-inch diameter natural gas pipeline under 763.4 pounds per square inch of pressure. The released natural gas exploded, resulting in injuries to two employees, substantial property damage, and emergency response.

Parties

2. The State of Iowa is a sovereign state of the United States of America.

3. Thomas J. Miller is the duly elected Attorney General for the State of Iowa.

4. Defendants Patrick and Cynthia DeRocher own and operate DeRocher Construction, with offices located at 25675 Highway K-49, Le Mars, IA 51031.

Definitions

5. "Emergency" means "a condition where there is clear and immediate danger to life or health, or essential services, or a potentially significant loss of property." Iowa Code § 480.1(3).

6. "Excavation" means "an operation in which a structure or earth, rock, or other material in or on the ground is moved, removed, or compressed, or otherwise displaced by means of any tools, equipment, or explosives and includes, but is not limited to, grading, trenching, tiling, digging, ditching, drilling, augering, tunneling, scraping, cable or pipe plowing, driving, and demolition of structures." Iowa Code § 480.1(4).

7. "Excavator" means "a person proposing to engage or engaging in excavation." Iowa Code § 480.1(5).

8. "Operator" means "a person owning or operating an underground facility including, but not limited to, public, private, and municipal utilities. An operator does not include a person who owns or otherwise lawfully occupies real property where an underground facility is located only for the use and benefit of the owner or occupant on the property." Iowa Code § 480.1(8).

9. "Underground facility" means an "item of personal property owned or leased by the operator which is buried or placed below ground for use in connection with the storage or conveyance of, or the provision of services supplying water, sewage, electronic, telephonic, or telegraphic communications, electric energy, hazardous liquids, or petroleum products including natural gas or other substances, and includes, but is not limited to, pipes, sewers, conduits, cables, valves, lines, wires, manholes, and attachments to such property but does not include

sanitary sewer laterals, storm sewer laterals, and water service lines providing service to abutting private properties.” Iowa Code § 480.1(10).

Jurisdiction

10. Iowa Code chapter 480, commonly referred to as the “Iowa One Call” statute, establishes a statewide notification center to receive, document and process notices of excavations. The statute also creates certain duties for excavators and owners and operators of underground facilities.

11. Iowa Code section 480.1A provides that a person shall not engage in any excavation unless the requirements of chapter 480 have been satisfied.

12. Iowa Code section 480.4(1)(a) provides that, prior to any excavation, an excavator shall contact the statewide notification center and provide notice of the planned excavation. The notice must be given at least 48 hours prior to the commencement of the excavation, excluding weekends and legal holidays. Notice is provided by calling the notification center at its toll-free number (1-800-292-8989 or 811). The notice for a location outside of city shall include:

1. the name of the county, township, range and section;
2. the name and address of the excavator;
3. the excavator’s telephone number;
4. the type and extent of the proposed excavation;
5. whether the discharge of explosives is anticipated;
6. the date and time when excavation is scheduled to begin;
7. approximate location of the excavation on the property; and

8. if known, the quarter section, E911 address and global positioning system coordinate, name of property owner, name of housing development with street address or block and lot numbers, or both.

Iowa Code §§ 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8).

13. Pursuant to Iowa Code section 480.4(2), the notification center upon receiving notice from an excavator must then immediately transmit the information contained in the notice to each operator of underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation and provide the names of all operators in that area to the excavator. Operators of underground facilities receiving notice must then mark the horizontal location of their underground facilities within 48 hours after receiving the notice, excluding weekends and legal holidays, unless otherwise agreed by the operator and the excavator. Iowa Code § 480.4(3)(a)(1).

14. The only exception to the requirements of Iowa Code section 480.4 is “when an emergency exists.” Iowa Code § 480.4(6).

15. Iowa Code section 480.6(1)(a) provides that a person who violates a provision of chapter 480 is subject to a civil penalty, when the violation is related to natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines, in an amount not to exceed Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00) for each violation for each day the violation continues, up to a maximum of Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00).

16. Iowa Code section 480.6(2) authorizes the Attorney General, upon the receipt of a complaint, to institute legal proceedings necessary to enforce the penalty provisions of chapter 480.

17. Iowa Code section 480.7 authorizes injunctive relief from any violation of Iowa Code chapter 480.

Facts

18. On April 25, 2012, the defendants conducted excavations to install drainage tile in Section 23, Township 90 North, Range 45 West, in rural Plymouth County, Iowa. The defendants did not contact the One Call Notification Center regarding these excavations and, thereby, failed to provide notices to operators of underground facilities whose facilities may be affected by the excavation. Instead, the defendants proceeded with the excavations without any underground facilities having been located and marked on the property.

19. Northern Natural Gas is the owner and operator of a 24-inch diameter natural gas pipeline, designated C-Line, and a 16-inch diameter natural gas pipeline, designated B-Line, which run underground in the vicinity of where the excavations occurred. The pipelines are approximately 100 feet apart.

20. Natural gas is flammable and highly explosive.

21. While conducting the excavations on April 25, 2012, the defendants' tiling plow hit and ruptured the 24-inch diameter C-Line natural gas pipeline which was under 763.4 pounds per square inch of pressure. The released natural gas exploded, resulting in injuries and hospitalization of two of the defendants' employees, creating a large crater (approximately 100 feet long, 35 feet wide, and 30 feet deep), scorching approximately 80 acres of fallow land, destroying the defendants' tiling plow and bulldozer, destroying an overhead high voltage power line and power line poles, and causing substantial property damage to the pipeline company including loss of natural gas, damage to the pipeline, repair and remediation costs. Emergency response was also made by the Remsen Volunteer Fire Department, Hinton Volunteer Fire Department, Lawton Fire Department, Le Mars Volunteer Fire Department, and Plymouth County Sheriff's Department.

22. On May 2, 2012, Northern Natural Gas responded to a One Call locate request by a landowner for the removal of trees, again in Section 23, Township 90 North, Range 45 West, in rural Plymouth County, Iowa. While locating and marking the pipelines, the pipeline staff observed an employee of the defendants excavating with a track-hoe to install drainage tile, approximately ¼ mile from the C-Line and B-Line pipelines. The defendants again had not contacted the One Call Notification Center regarding these excavations and, thereby, failed to provide notices to operators of underground facilities whose facilities may be affected by the excavation. Instead, the defendants had proceeded with the excavations without any underground facilities having been located and marked on the property.

23. Digging with a tiling plow or track-hoe to install drainage tile constitutes “excavation” as defined in Iowa Code section 480.1(4).

24. At all material times hereto, defendants were an “excavator” as defined in Iowa Code section 480.1(5).

25. A buried natural gas pipeline is an “underground facility” as defined in Iowa Code section 480.1(10).

26. At all material times hereto, there was no “emergency” as defined in Iowa Code section 480.1(3), that would exempt defendants from the requirement that they contact the statewide notification center prior to the excavations and, thereby, provide notice to owners and operators of underground facilities whose facilities may be affected by the excavations.

Violations

27. On April 25, 2012, Defendants Patrick DeRocher and Cynthia DeRocher, d/b/a DeRocher Construction, engaged in excavations in Section 23, Township 90 North, Range 45 West in rural Plymouth County, Iowa, without first contacting the statewide notification center

and providing notice, in violation of Iowa Code sections 480.1A, 480.4(1)(a), and 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8).

28. On May 2, 2012, Defendants Patrick DeRocher and Cynthia DeRocher, d/b/a DeRocher Construction, engaged in excavations in Section 23, Township 90 North, Range 45 West in rural Plymouth County, Iowa, without first contacting the statewide notification center and providing notice, in violation of Iowa Code sections 480.1A, 480.4(1)(a), and 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8).

Prayer for Relief

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff State of Iowa, ex rel., Thomas J. Miller, Attorney General of Iowa, requests that the Court:

a. assess a civil penalty against Defendants Patrick DeRocher and Cynthia DeRocher, d/b/a DeRocher Construction, pursuant to Iowa Code section 480.6(1)(a) for each day of violation of Iowa Code sections 480.1A, 480.4(1)(a), and 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8), involving natural gas pipelines, not to exceed Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00) for each day of each such violation; and

b. issue a permanent injunction enjoining Defendants Patrick DeRocher and Cynthia DeRocher, d/b/a DeRocher Construction, from commencing any non-emergency excavation in the State of Iowa, without first contacting the statewide notification center at its toll-free number (1-800-292-8989 or 811), at least 48 hours prior to the planned excavation, excluding weekends and legal holidays, as required by Iowa Code sections 480.1A and 480.4(1)(a), and providing the information required by Iowa Code sections 480.4(1)(b)(1)-(8) and 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8); enjoining the defendant from commencing any excavation except under the schedule and pursuant to the terms of each such notification.

Plaintiff further requests that the Court tax the costs of this action to the defendant and provide such other relief as the Court may deem just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

THOMAS J. MILLER
Attorney General of Iowa



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