

IN THE IOWA DISTRICT COURT FOR HARDIN COUNTY

STATE OF IOWA, ex rel., THOMAS J.
MILLER, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF
IOWA (99AG23112),

Plaintiff,

vs.

HANDS ON EXCAVATING, L.L.C.,

Defendant.

CASE NO. _____

PETITION IN EQUITY

COMES NOW Plaintiff State of Iowa, ex rel., Thomas J. Miller, Attorney General of Iowa, and for its claim against Defendant Hands on Excavating, L.L.C., states as follows:

Introduction

1. The State of Iowa seeks the assessment of civil penalties and injunctive relief against Defendant Hands on Excavating, L.L.C. (“Hands on Excavating”) for violations of the “Iowa One Call” statute, Iowa Code chapter 480. Hands on Excavating provided timely and proper notice of a planned excavation to repair drainage tile. Hands on Excavating then exceeded the limits of that notice by going beyond the planned excavation to repair additional drainage tile without providing additional notice. Thus, Hands on Excavating failed to provide 48-hours notice of a planned excavation and, without any underground facilities having been located and marked, proceeded with the excavation to repair additional drainage tile. The excavations occurred within 25 feet of an underground natural gas transmission line without having a representative of the transmission line present for the excavation. During the excavation, Hands on Excavating’s equipment hit and damaged a 3-inch diameter natural gas pipeline under 814 pounds per square inch of pressure.

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. Defendant Hands on Excavating is an Iowa corporation located at 12676 290th Street, Radcliffe, Iowa 50230.

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).

10. “Transmission line” means “a pipeline, other than a gathering line, that: (1) Transports gas from a gathering line or storage facility to a distribution center, storage facility, or large volume customer that is not down-stream from a distribution center; (2) operates at a hoop stress of 20 percent or more of SMYS; or (3) transports gas within a storage field.” 9 C.F.R. § 192.3 (2015).

Jurisdiction

11. 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.

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

13. 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 a 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).

14. 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).

15. Iowa Code section 480.4(3)(a)(3) provides that no excavation shall be performed within twenty-five (25) feet of an underground natural gas transmission line as defined in 49 C.F.R. section 192.3 unless a representative of the operator of the underground natural gas transmission line is present at the planned excavation area.

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

17. 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).

18. 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.

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

Facts

20. On or about March 16, 2015, Hands on Excavating placed a One Call locate request for an excavation in rural Hardin County, near the intersection of 280th Street and K Avenue, to repair drainage tile. Hands on Excavating completed the tile drainage repair excavation on or about March 20, 2015.

21. On or about March 24, 2015, Hands on Excavating conducted additional excavations in rural Hardin County, near the intersection of 280th Street and Jj Avenue, to repair drainage tile. The excavations were outside the area identified in the March 16, 2015 locate request.

22. Hands on Excavating began excavating on March 24, 2015, prior to having any underground facilities located and marked and, thereby, failed to provide 48-hours notice to operators of underground facilities whose facilities may be affected by the excavation.

23. Northern Natural Gas (“NNG”) is the owner and operator of a 3-inch diameter natural gas pipeline under 814 pounds per square inch (psi) of pressure, which runs underground in the vicinity of where the excavation occurred.

24. Natural gas is flammable and highly explosive.

25. During the excavation, Hands on Excavating hit and damaged the natural gas pipeline. No representative of NNG was present when Hands on Excavating commenced the excavation and damaged the pipeline. Emergency response was made by Northern Natural Gas staff.

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

27. At all material times hereto, Hands on Excavating was an “excavator” as defined in Iowa Code section 480.1(5).

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

29. At all material times hereto, there was no “emergency,” as defined in Iowa Code section 480.1(3), that would exempt Hands on Excavating from the requirement that it contact the statewide notification center provide 48-hours notice of the planned excavation.

Violations

30. On or about March 24, 2015, Defendant Hands on Excavating engaged in an excavation in rural Hardin County, near the intersection of 280th Street and Jj Avenue, without

providing 48-hours notice of the planned excavation, in violation of Iowa Code sections 480.1A, 480.4(1)(a), and 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8).

31. On or about March 24, 2015, Defendant Hands on Excavating engaged in an excavation in rural Hardin County, near the intersection of 280th Street and Jj Avenue, within twenty-five (25) feet of an underground natural gas transmission line without having a representative of the operator of the transmission line present, in violation of Iowa Code sections 480.1A and 480.4(3)(a)(3).

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 Defendant Hands on Excavating, L.L.C. pursuant to Iowa Code section 480.6(1)(a) for each day of violation of Iowa Code sections 480.1A, 480.4(1)(a), 480.4(1)(c)(1)-(8), and 480.4(3)(a)(3) 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 Defendant Hands on Excavating, L.L.C. 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 within twenty-five (25) feet of an underground natural gas transmission line without having a representative of the operator of the transmission line present as required by Iowa Code section 480.4(3)(a)(3); and 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

/s/ Jacob J. Larson

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