



Ameren Illinois Reminds Customers to Follow Law and Call 811 Before Planting a Garden, Installing Fence, Etc.

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COLLINSVILLE – In conjunction with National Safe Digging Month, Ameren Illinois is reminding customers to follow the law and call 811 before planting a garden, installing a fence post or starting any other outdoor project that requires digging.

“With the weather warming up and more people at home amid COVID-19, folks are turning to do-it-yourself (DIY) work in and around their yards,” said Eric Kozak, Vice President of Natural Gas Operations and Technical Services, Ameren Illinois. “Calls to 811 across our service territory are actually up 125 percent compared to 2019, but we still find there are many people who either do not know about this service or choose not to call.”

Kozak said that now more than ever it’s critical customers call at least two business days before digging. The free service identifies the location of buried infrastructure, helping to prevent potentially dangerous natural gas leaks while also ensuring homes stays fully connected during the pandemic.

811 is a national number that connects to an organization called JULIE in Illinois. If JULIE determines that Ameren Illinois has underground facilities in the requested dig location, the organization issues a dig ticket. Ameren Illinois then dispatches USIC within two business days to identify and mark the lines. Digging can only begin once the marking process is complete and the start time on the ticket is valid. And even after

facilities are marked, all digging within the tolerant zone --- 18 inches on either side of a marked line – must be completed carefully by hand.

In addition to calling, requests can be made online by visiting, Illinois1call.com.

In the event that an underground facility is inadvertently struck while digging, there are two courses of action depending on whether natural gas is leaking.

- If the strike results in a rotten egg smell, blowing dirt or bubbling water, then natural gas is likely leaking. Immediately clear the area and call 911, then Ameren Illinois at 800-755-5000, and then 811.
- If there is no noticeable release of natural gas, stop digging immediately and call Ameren Illinois at 800-755-5000. Ameren Illinois must arrive on scene to make repairs to the damaged line before the project can continue.

“Do not under any circumstance ignore a facility strike and continue working,” Kozak added. “Too often, people overlook damaged pipelines and continue working or attempt fix to damage on their own. This can create a more dangerous situation.”

Kozak said both Ameren Illinois electric/natural gas employees and locating services are considered essential, exempting them from the Governor’s statewide-Stay-at-Home Order. However, field crews will take extra precautions, such as social distancing, to mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19.

"It should go without saying, but we also need to make sure our customers know not to approach our crews and to keep a safe distance so the work can be completed," Kozak said.

About Ameren Illinois

Ameren Illinois delivers energy to 1.2 million electric and 816,000 natural gas customers throughout central and southern Illinois. Our service territory covers more than 1,200 communities and 43,700 square miles and our mission is to power the quality of life. For more information, visit AmerenIllinois.com. Follow us on Twitter @AmerenIllinois and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/AmerenIllinois).