

Service Date: October 29, 2024

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

NOTICE OF PENALTIES INCURRED AND DUE FOR VIOLATIONS OF LAWS AND RULES

PENALTY ASSESSMENT: D-240736
PENALTY AMOUNT: \$5,000
Investigation # 8958

SERVICE VIA EMAIL

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YOU MUST RESPOND WITHIN 15 DAYS OF THIS NOTICE

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes that Avista Corporation (Avista or Company) violated Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 19.122.030(3)(a) by failing to provide the excavator with reasonably accurate information by marking the location of its facilities.

RCW 19.122.070(1) states, in part, that violations of any provision of the chapter are subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000 for an initial violation and not more than \$5,000 for each subsequent violation within a three-year period.

On September 25, 2024, the Safety Committee heard case 24-077 filed by M&L Construction Inc. (M&L or Complainant) against Avista Corporation (Avista) and determined Avista violated RCW 19.122.030(3)(a) by failing to provide the excavator with reasonably accurate information by marking the location of its facilities. The Safety Committee recommended that the Commission impose a \$5,000 penalty.

Commission staff (Staff) reviewed the documents, reports, and communications with the Safety Committee and agreed with the Safety Committee's findings and recommendations.

The Commission hereby notifies you that it is assessing a \$5,000 penalty (Penalty Assessment) against you on the following grounds:

1. **Alleged Violation(s):**

The Complainant states that on August 22, 2024, Avista failed to determine the location of an underground facility with reasonable accuracy at 4604 North Heartly, Spokane, WA.

2. **Analysis:**

The alleged violation concerns RCW 19.122.030(3)(a), which states, in part, that a facility operator will provide the excavator with reasonably accurate information by marking the location of its facilities. On August 12, 2024, M&L Construction requested a locate ticket for W Hoffman Place and North Hartley Street, Spokane, WA (ticket #24337249). M&L stated that it was directional boring under a valid ticket. M&L had completed a pilot bore and pulled back a 2" line. The Company noted that after it completed the boring process another crew started digging with an excavator to set a hand hole, and there were no indications of a gas line in the area. M&L stated that as the crew dug, the laborer saw that a tracer wire was broken and excavation was stopped. M&L proceeded with caution and found an unmarked ADYL gas line inches away from the tracer wire. M&L provided pictures of the excavation area that appeared to show that the gas line had not been marked.

Avista did not participate in the peer review but provided a written response. Avista stated that the gas line M&L discovered was incorrectly mapped in Avista's GIS system. Avista noted that during its investigation, Avista identified the line as the gas service for 4610 N Hartley, Spokane, WA. Avista found that initial mapping during the locate and excavation suggested that the service was a split (twin) with 4604 extending around the back of 4604's house and away from the excavation area. Avista stated that ELM hooked up to the 4604 N gas meter with the understanding that the 4610 service would be accounted for through that hook-up location. Avista stated that through further locating efforts and verification with the original installation records after M&L's discovery, it accurately determined the service line's correct location. Avista updated its mapping to reflect the proper location and adjusted its locating procedures to verify split services. Avista believes the change will help ensure mapping accuracy and prevent potential errors that could lead to unlocated facilities.

Staff reviewed the Washington One Call Center database and confirmed a valid locate ticket (ticket #24337249) had been requested by M&L. The location of the facility that was not marked was within the excavation area identified by M&L Construction. Staff also confirmed through a Google Map search that the location identified in the locate ticket is in front of 4604 N Hartley, Spokane, WA.

The Commission considered the following factors in determining the appropriate penalty amount for the violation:

1. **How serious or harmful the violation is to the public.**

This incident could have been significantly more harmful to M&L workers, utility technicians, nearby homeowners, and the public, and it could have resulted in severe injury and/or loss of property.

2. **Whether the violation is intentional.**

The violation does not appear to be intentional, but rather due to negligence by Avista and its locators. Over the past 36 months (October 9, 2021 - October 9, 2024), Avista has been penalized by the Commission on fourteen occasions for violations of RCW 19.122.030. Avista is aware of the requirements to comply with the dig law but continues to have violations involving its locating practices.

3. **The likelihood of recurrence.**

The likelihood of recurrence depends on Avista’s actions going forward, and its ability to ensure that its contract locator and its contract locator’s processes are sufficient to comply with the requirements of the dig law.

5. **The Company’s previous violations and penalties.**

- **Warning Letter**

On January 11, 2024, the Commission mailed an Alleged Violation of Washington Dig Law letter to Avista for violation of RCW 19.122.055(1)(a) which states, in part, that an excavator must contact the one-number locate center before beginning excavation. The letter included detailed information about Washington state’s underground utility damage prevention act, requirements for submitting utility locate requests before excavating, and the possibility of penalties for each violation. The Commission mailed the letter after receiving a report of damage caused by Avista’s electric crew on October 20, 2023, that occurred because the Company failed to submit a request to locate underground utilities before excavating.

- **Penalty Assessments:**

D-240487	8-5-24	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-240566	8-7-24	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-240262	6-18-24	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-230967	1-12-24	Penalty Notice \$10,000	RCW 19.122.030(4)(a) RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-230858	1-12-24	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(4)(a)
D-230098	4-17-23	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(4)(a)
D-230100	4-17-23	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(4)(a)
D-230099	4-17-23	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(4)(a)
D-230005	3-13-23	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-230007	2-22-23	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-220230	5-26-22	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-220112	3-29-22	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(4)(a)
D-220111	3-29-22	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)
D-210605	12-28-21	Penalty Notice \$5,000	RCW 19.122.030(3)(a)

The Commission has considered these factors and agrees with the Safety Committee’s findings of probable violation and penalty recommendation, as follows:

- \$5,000 penalty for one violation of RCW 19.122.030(3)(a).

These facts, if proven at a hearing and not rebutted or explained, are sufficient to support the Penalty Assessment.

Your penalty is due and payable now. If you believe the violation did not occur, you may deny committing the violation and contest the penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. Or, if there is a reason for the violation that you believe should excuse you from the penalty, you may ask for mitigation (reduction) of the penalty through evidence presented at a

hearing or in writing. The Commission will grant a request for a hearing only if material issues of law or fact require consideration of evidence and resolution in a hearing. Any request to contest the violation or for mitigation of the penalty must include a written statement of the reasons supporting that request. Failure to provide such a statement will result in denial of the request. *See* RCW 81.04.405.

If you properly present your request for a hearing and the Commission grants that request, the Commission will review the evidence supporting your dispute of the violation or application for mitigation in a Brief Adjudicative Proceeding before an administrative law judge. The administrative law judge will consider the evidence and will notify you of their decision.

You must act within 15 days after receiving this Penalty Assessment to do one of the following:

- Pay the \$5,000 penalty amount due; or
- Request a hearing to contest the occurrence of the violation; or
- Request mitigation to reduce the amount of the penalty.

Please indicate your selection on the enclosed form and submit it electronically through the Commission's web portal at <https://efiling.utc.wa.gov/Form> **within FIFTEEN (15) days** after you receive this Penalty Assessment. If you are unable to use the web portal, you may submit it via email to records@utc.wa.gov. If you are unable to submit the form electronically, you may send a paper copy to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, P.O. Box 47250, Olympia, Washington 98504-7250.

If you wish to make your payment online, please use this link: [Make a Payment Now \(wa.gov\)](#).¹

If you do not act within 15 days, the Commission may refer this matter to the Office of the Attorney General for collection.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective October 29, 2024.

/s/ James E. Brown II
JAMES E. BROWN II
Acting Director, Administrative Law Division

¹ <https://www.utc.wa.gov/documents-and-proceedings/online-payments/make-payment-now>.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT D-240736 Investigation # 8958

PLEASE NOTE: You must complete and sign this document and send it to the Commission within 15 days after you receive the Penalty Assessment. Use additional paper if needed.

I have read and understand RCW 9A.72.020 (printed below), which states that making false statements under oath is a class B felony. I am over the age of 18, competent to testify to the matters set forth below, and I have personal knowledge of those matters. I hereby make, under oath, the following statements:

1. **Payment of penalty.** I admit that the violation occurred and:
- Enclose \$5,000 in payment of the penalty.
- OR Attest that I have paid the penalty in full through the Commission's payment portal.
2. **Contest the violation.** I believe that the alleged violation did not occur for the reasons I describe below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your contest here, your request will be denied**):
- a) I ask for a hearing to present evidence on the information I provide above to an administrative law judge for a decision.
- OR b) I ask for a Commission decision based solely on the information I provide above.
3. **Request mitigation.** I admit the violation, but I believe that the penalty should be reduced for the reasons set out below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your application here, your request will be denied**):
- a) I ask for a hearing to present evidence on the information I provide above to an administrative law judge for a decision.
- OR b) I ask for a Commission decision based solely on the information I provide above.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the state of Washington that the foregoing, including information I have presented on any attachments, is true and correct.

Dated: _____ [Month/Day/Year], at _____ [City, State]

Name of Respondent (Company) – please print

Signature of Applicant

RCW 9A.72.020 "Perjury in the first degree."

- (1) A person is guilty of perjury in the first degree if in any official proceeding he or she makes a materially false statement which he or she knows to be false under an oath required or authorized by law.
- (2) Knowledge of the materiality of the statement is not an element of this crime, and the actor's mistaken belief that his or her statement was not material is not a defense to a prosecution under this section.
- (3) Perjury in the first degree is a class B felony.