

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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

**PENALTY ASSESSMENT: DG-171214
PENALTY AMOUNT: \$1,000**

Steve Ruhnke Construction, Inc.
17066 Beaton Rd. SE, Suite 190B
Monroe, WA 98272-1002

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes you have violated Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 19.122.030(2) by failing to provide the required notice to a one-number locator service not less than two business days before excavating. RCW 19.122.055(1)(a) states, in part, that any excavator who fails to notify a one-number locator service and causes damage to a underground gas utility is subject to a civil penalty of not more than ten thousand dollars for each violation.

Commission pipeline safety staff (Staff) reviewed damage reports submitted by Puget Sound Energy (PSE), and information obtained from the One Call 811 database, and hereby notifies you that the Commission is assessing a penalty against you in the amount of \$1,000 on the following grounds:

On December 1, 2016, Steve Ruhnke Construction, Inc. (Ruhnke Construction) was installing storm drains at 12525 80th Ave. in Kirkland, Washington. While excavating, Ruhnke Construction broke a PSE 2 inch PE main stub. The Damage Information Reporting Tool (DIRT) report submitted by PSE on February 21, 2017, indicated that a one-number locator service was not notified prior to excavation. Staff found that Ruhnke Construction did submit a utility locate request on Sept. 28, 2016, but it expired after 45 days on November 12, 2016.

Ruhnke Construction has two previous penalties issued by the Commission for two separate violations of RCW 19.122.030 that occurred in 2015. The first violation occurred on January 9, 2015, when Ruhnke Construction struck and damaged a City of Lacey sewer main without first properly requesting utility locates (Docket D-150572). The \$1,000 penalty in this case was suspended for one year on the conditions that Ruhnke Construction commits no further violations of RCW 19.122 within 12 months and that company representatives attend Dig Safe training.

The second violation occurred on July 2, 2015, when Ruhnke Construction again failed to request utility locates prior to excavating and subsequently damaged a PSE service line. The penalty levied for this violation was \$2,500 (Docket D-151944) and due to the incident occurring approximately six months later, the suspended \$1,000 penalty in Docket D-150572 became immediately due and payable as well. Ruhnke Construction promptly paid all \$3,500 in outstanding penalties.

Accordingly, Staff recommends a \$1,000 penalty be assessed against Ruhnke Construction for one repeat violation of RCW 19.122.030(2), for failing to provide the required notice to a one-number locator service not less than two business days before excavating.

Staff's research indicates that Ruhnke Construction has a significant history of requesting utility locates and that the violations were the result of company negligence, not lack of knowledge of the requirements of Washington State's dig law.

The Commission agrees with Staff's recommendation and assesses a penalty of \$1,000

These facts, if not contested or if proved 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 assessment through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. The Commission will grant a request for hearing only if material issues of law or fact concerning the violation require consideration of evidence and resolution in a hearing. Any contest of the penalty assessment must include a written statement of the reasons supporting that contest. Failure to provide such a statement will result in denial of the contest.

If you admit the violation but believe there is a reason for the violation that should excuse you from the penalty, you may ask for mitigation (reduction) of this penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. The Commission will grant a request for hearing only if material issues of law or fact require consideration of evidence and resolution in a hearing. Any request for mitigation must include a written statement of the reasons supporting that request. Failure to provide such a statement will result in denial of the request.

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 his or her decision.

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

- Pay the \$1,000 amount due;
- 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 send it to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, Post Office Box 47250, Olympia, Washington 98504-7250, **within FIFTEEN (15) days** after you receive this notice.

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

DATED at Olympia, Washington, and effective January 31, 2018.

/s/ Gregory J. Kopta
GREGORY J. KOPTA
Director, Administrative Law Division

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT DG-171214

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, am 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 violations occurred and enclose \$1,000 in payment of the penalty
2. **Contest the violations.** I believe that the alleged violations did not occur for the reasons I describe below (**if you do not include reasons supporting your contest here, your request will be denied. Attach additional sheets if necessary**):
- 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 violations, 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. Attach additional sheets if necessary**):
- 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 makes a materially false statement which he 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 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.”