

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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

PENALTY ASSESSMENT: DG-190371
PENALTY AMOUNT: \$1,000
Investigation #7967

UBI: 602-046-666
Phone: (253) 333-9477

Ground Effects Landscaping, Inc.
302 Western Ave NW
Auburn, WA 98001

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes that you have violated Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 19.122.030(2) by failing to request a dig ticket prior to excavating and subsequently damaging an underground natural gas facility. RCW 19.122.055 states, in part, that any excavator who fails to notify a one-number locator service and causes damage to a hazardous liquid or gas facility is subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$10,000 for each violation.

Commission staff (Staff) conducted an investigation that included reviewing damage reports submitted by Cascade Natural Gas Corporation (CNGC), which identified a natural gas damage event involving Ground Effects Landscaping, Inc. (Ground Effects or Company). Accordingly, the Commission hereby notifies you that it is assessing a penalty against you for \$1,000 on the following grounds:

On October 23, 2015, the Commission mailed an Alleged Violation of Washington Dig Law letter to Ground Effects. 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 sent the letter after receiving a report of damage caused by Ground Effects in August 2015 that occurred because Ground Effects failed to submit a request to locate underground utilities before excavating.

On December 17, 2018, Ground Effects was excavating at 4826 Castleton Rd SW, Port Orchard, Washington. While working, Ground Effects employees struck and damaged an underground CNGC gas facility. The Damage Information Reporting Tool report submitted by CNGC on December 19, 2018, indicated that the Company was excavating without a valid request to locate underground utilities.

Staff recommends the Commission assess a \$1,000 penalty against Ground Effects for one violation of RCW 19.122.030(2) for failing to provide the required notice to a one-number locator service before excavating, as follows:

- No penalty for the violation of RCW 19.122.030(2) that occurred in August, 2015; and
- \$1,000 penalty for the violation of RCW 19.122.030(2) that occurred on December 17, 2018.

Staff's investigation found that Ground Effects has submitted 914 requests to locate underground utilities since January 2018, and the violation appears to be the result of the Company's negligence rather than a lack of knowledge of the requirements of Washington state's dig law. After considering all of the circumstances, Staff recommends that the Commission offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, the \$1,000 penalty amount, subject to the condition that the Company incurs no further violations of RCW 19.122 within 12 months of the date of this Notice.

The Commission agrees with Staff's recommendation and assesses a penalty of \$1,000, with an offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, the entire \$1,000 penalty amount subject to the condition described above. If the Company fails to comply with the condition the \$1,000 suspended penalty will become immediately due and payable in addition to any new penalties that the Commission may assess for additional violations.

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 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 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 his or her decision.

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

- Pay the \$1,000 penalty amount due; or
- Notify the Commission that you accept the offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, the entire \$1,000 penalty subject to the following condition:
 - Ground Effects incurs no additional violations of RCW 19.122 within 12 months of the date of this Notice; 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 send it to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, P.O. 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 June 5, 2019.

/s/ Rayne Pearson
RAYNE PEARSON
Director, Administrative Law Division

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT DG-190371, Investigation #7967

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 violation occurred and enclose \$1,000 in payment of the penalty.

- 2. **Accept conditions.** I admit that the violation occurred and accept the Commission's offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, the entire \$1,000 penalty amount subject to the following condition:
 - Ground Effects incurs no additional violations of RCW 19.122 within twelve (12) months of the date of this Notice.

- 3. **Contest the violation.** I believe that the alleged violation(s) 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.

- 4. **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 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.”