

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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

PENALTY ASSESSMENT: DG-210760

PENALTY AMOUNT: \$10,000

Investigation #8390

UBI: 601-927-147

SERVICE VIA EMAIL

SEFNCO Communications Inc.
3014 North Flora Rd
Spokane, WA 99216
adandino@sefco.com

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes that SEFNCO Communications Inc. (SEFNCO or Company) has violated the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 19.122.055(1)(a) by failing to notify one-number locator service before beginning excavation. RCW 9.122.055(1)(a) states, in part, that excavators who fail to notify a one-number locator service and cause damage to an underground gas facility are subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$10,000 for each violation.

The Commission reviewed findings and recommendations made by its staff (Staff) and hereby notifies you that it is assessing a \$10,000 penalty (Penalty Assessment) against you on the following grounds:

On June 1, 2021, SEFNCO was excavating at 6329 S 226th St. Kent, Washington. While excavating, SEFNCO struck an underground Puget Sound Energy (PSE) natural gas facility. The Damage Information Reporting Tool report submitted by PSE on July 14, 2021, indicated that the Company was excavating without a valid locate ticket.

Staff conducted an investigation that included reviewing damage reports, investigation reports, and the One-Call Ticket database. Staff made contact with SEFNCO and the Company acknowledged it failed to call in its own locates when this incident occurred. The documents reviewed identified a natural gas event that involved SEFNCO damaging a natural gas line while excavating without a valid locate ticket.

The Company received a warning letter from the Commission on September 25, 2019, and has been penalized by the Commission previously. On December 8, 2017, the Commission issued SEFNCO a \$10,000 penalty for one violation of RCW 19.122.055(1)(a). On December 3, 2019, the Commission issued SEFNCO a \$10,000 penalty for one violation of RCW 19.122.055(1)(a).

SEFNCO has paid its previous penalties in full, accepted responsibility for the violations cited in this Penalty Assessment, and cooperated during this investigation. It has been almost two (2) years since the Company's last Dig Law violation. Staff reviewed the dig

safe training and found there are no SEFNCO employees enrolled in Dig Safe training. Because the Commission's ultimate goal is to improve safety and increase compliance, Staff recommends the Commission assess a reduced penalty subject to the condition that SEFNCO receive additional Dig Safe training, as follows:

- A \$10,000 penalty for one violation of RCW 9.122.055(1)(a) with the opportunity to suspend a \$5,000 portion of the penalty for one year, and then waive it, subject to the conditions that: (1) SEFNCO supervisors and field crew responsible for excavation complete Dig Safe Training provided through the National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA) within ninety (90) days of the date of this Penalty Assessment, (2) the Company incurs no additional dig law violations within twelve (12) months of the date of this Penalty Assessment, and (3) the Company timely pays the \$5,000 portion of the penalty that is not suspended.

The Commission agrees with Staff's recommendation and assesses a penalty of \$10,000, with an offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, \$5,000 of the penalty subject to the conditions described above.

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 their decision.

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

- Pay the \$10,000 penalty amount due; or
- Pay \$5,000 and notify the Commission that you accept the offer to suspend the remaining \$5,000 of the penalty amount subject to the following conditions:
 - SEFNCO management and field crew responsible for excavation must complete NUCA Dig Safe Training (<https://utc-9183.quickbase.com/db/bpkt6vndh>) within 90 days of service of this Penalty Assessment; and
 - **The Company must submit documentation of that attendance to the Commission within five (5) days of attending training;** and
 - SEFNCO must not commit any additional violations of RCW 19.122 within twelve (12) months of the date of this Penalty Assessment; 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 file it with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission at records@utc.wa.gov **within FIFTEEN (15) days** after you receive this Penalty Assessment.

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 Lacey, Washington, and effective October 26, 2021.

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

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PENALTY ASSESSMENT DG-210760 Investigation #8390

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 \$10,000 in payment of the penalty.
2. **Accept the Conditions.** I admit that the violation occurred, enclose \$5,000 in partial payment of the penalty, and I also accept the Commission's offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, the \$5,000 of the penalty amount subject to the following conditions:
- SEFNCO supervisors and applicable field staff must attend dig safe training provided through NUCA within 90 days of the date of this Notice; and
 - SEFNCO must submit documentation of that attendance to the Commission within five (5) days of attending the training;** and
 - SEFNCO must not commit any additional violations of RCW 19.122 within twelve (12) months of the date of this Notice.

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 provided 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 provided 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.”