

**WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

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

PENALTY ASSESSMENT: DG-230519

PENALTY AMOUNT: \$2,000

Investigation # 8713

**EMAIL SERVICE**

UBI: 600-405-460

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**YOU MUST RESPOND WITHIN 15 DAYS OF THIS NOTICE**

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) believes that Reliable Construction Inc. (Reliable Construction or Company) violated Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 19.122.055(1)(a) by failing to notify the one-number locate service and caused damage to an underground gas facility.

RCW 19.122.055(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.

Commission staff (Staff) conducted an investigation that included reviewing damage reports, investigation reports, a review of the One Call Center database, and communications with the Company. The documents reviewed identified a natural gas event that involved Reliable Construction damaging a natural gas facility while excavating without a valid locate ticket.

The Commission reviewed findings and recommendations made by Commission staff and hereby notifies you that it is assessing a \$2,000 penalty (Penalty Assessment) against you on the following grounds:

**1. Alleged Violation 1:**

On February 16, 2023, Reliable Construction was excavating at 7705 131<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE, Kirkland, Washington. While excavating, Reliable Construction workers struck and damaged an underground Puget Sound Energy (PSE) natural gas facility. The Damage Information Reporting Tool (DIRT) report submitted by PSE on March 31, 2023, indicated that Reliable Construction was excavating without a valid request to locate underground utilities.

2. **Alleged Violation 2:**

On February 28, 2023, Reliable Construction was excavating at 7705 131<sup>st</sup> Ave NE, Kirkland, Washington. While excavating, Reliable Construction workers struck and damaged an underground PSE natural gas facility. The DIRT report submitted by PSE on April 10, 2023, indicated that Reliable Construction was excavating without a valid request to locate underground utilities.

3. **Analysis:**

**Violation 1**

The alleged violation concerns RCW 19.122.055(1)(a), which states, in part, that an excavator must contact the one-number locate center before beginning excavation. On February 16, 2023, Reliable Construction was excavating for irrigation work when it struck a PSE 5/8" natural gas line. The Gas First Responder (GFR) report from PSE stated that Reliable Construction was hand-digging when the damage occurred. The Company reported that it had submitted previous requests for locates, but that it had failed to maintain them. The ELM Utilities Services (ELM) report states that the ticket for Reliable Construction was expired at the time the damage occurred on February 16, 2023. Staff reviewed the One Call Center ticket database and found ticket #23056675 was called in on February 16, 2023, the same day the damage occurred. The ticket description was to mark the "front of the property and from the property at abv address to abv inter." This description does not include the side of the house. Staff also found ticket #22489350, which was valid from November 8, 2022, until December 23, 2023. The description on this ticket was also for the front of the house and did not include the side.

**Violation 2**

The alleged violation concerns RCW 19.122.055(1)(a), which states, in part, that an excavator must contact the one-number locate center before beginning excavation. On February 28, 2023, Reliable Construction was excavating for sewer work when it struck a PSE 5/8" natural gas line. The GFR report from PSE states that Reliable Construction was excavating and did not have a valid locate ticket. The GFR report explains that there was a previous ticket called in for that address, but it did not include the side of the house, which is where the damage occurred. The ELM report states that the same service was already hit previously and that there was still no valid ticket for the address. ELM reported that Reliable Construction was also not using proper care while excavating and this resulted in damage to the same service again. Staff reviewed the One Call Center ticket database and found ticket #23070486 which was called in on February 28, 2023, the same day the damage occurred, this included an update to the scope of the work being performed.

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 Company workers, utility technicians, nearby homeowners, and the public, and could have resulted in severe injury and/or loss of property.

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

The violation appears to be due to negligence rather than a lack of knowledge of Washington state's dig law. In the past 12 months, Reliable Construction has called in 128 requests to the One Call Center for locates. This demonstrates the Company's knowledge of its requirements and responsibility to contact the one-number locate service before beginning excavation.

3. **Whether the company self-reported the violation.**

Reliable Construction did not self-report the violation. The Commission became aware of the violation when PSE filed a DIRT report following the damage incident.

4. **The likelihood of recurrence.**

The likelihood of recurrence depends on the Company's actions going forward and its willingness to notify the one-number locate service before beginning excavation.

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

On September 1, 2013, February 3, 2017, and September 26, 2022, the Commission mailed Alleged Violation of Washington Dig Law letters to Reliable Construction. The letters 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 has considered these factors and determined that it should penalize Reliable Construction as follows:

- \$2,000 penalty for two violations of RCW 19.122.055(1)(a) with an offer to suspend a \$1,800 portion of the penalty for one year, and then waive it, subject to the conditions that:
  - 1) Company supervisors and field crew responsible for excavation complete Dig Safe Training provided through the National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA) within 90 days of this Penalty Assessment;
  - 2) The Company must submit documentation of that attendance to the Commission; and
  - 3) The Company must not commit any further violations of RCW 19.122 within 12 months of the date of this Penalty Assessment.

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(s) did not occur, you may deny committing the violation(s) and contest the penalty through evidence presented at a hearing or in writing. Or, if there is a reason for the violation(s) 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(s) 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(s) 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 \$2,000 penalty amount due; or
- Pay \$200 and notify the Commission that you accept the offer to suspend a \$1,800 portion of the penalty amount subject to the following conditions:
  - Reliable Construction management and the 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;** and
  - Reliable Construction must not incur any additional violations of RCW 19.122 within 12 months of the date of this Penalty Assessment; or
- Request a hearing to contest the occurrence of the violations; 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](mailto: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, PO Box 47250, Olympia, Washington 98504-7250.

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

**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 July 25, 2023.

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

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

**WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**  
PENALTY ASSESSMENT DG-230519 Investigation #8713

**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:  
[ ] Enclose \$2,000 in payment of the penalty.  
OR [ ] Attest that I have paid the penalty in full through the Commission's payment portal.
- [ ] 2. **Accept conditions.** I admit that the violation occurred and enclose \$200 toward the payment of the penalty. I also accept the Commission's offer to suspend, and ultimately waive, the remaining \$1,800 penalty amount subject to the following conditions:
- o Company management must attend Dig Safe training provided through NUCA within 90 days of service of this Penalty Assessment; and
  - o The Company must submit documentation of that attendance to the Commission; and
  - o The Company must not commit any further 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 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 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.