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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 24, 2015

NEWS RELEASE

Pipeline Safety Bureau Officials Celebrate Safe Digging Month

PRC Staff Joins NM811, NM Utility Contractors Association & NM Regional Common Ground Alliance Reps to Tout Safety

ALBUQUERQUE – Officials with the Public Regulation Commission’s Pipeline Safety Bureau joined members of New Mexico 811, the New Mexico Utility Contractors Association and others during the National Safe Digging Month Celebration held at NM811 headquarters in Albuquerque on Thursday, April 23.

The Public Regulation Commission (PRC) officially kicked off Safe Digging Month in New Mexico with the signing of a resolution on March 25. Safe Digging Month is a safety and prevention-themed program promoted nationwide by the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, and promoted locally by the New Mexico Common Ground Alliance and the PRC’s Pipeline Safety Bureau, among others.

The commemorative month primarily serves to raise awareness of local 811 Call Before You Dig hotlines that connect homeowners and contractors to utilities that deploy line locators to mark the ground where digging is planned in order to prevent injury, line damage, and disruptions to service.

Public support for New Mexico 811 is particularly important during the spring and summer months, when homeowners carry out planned projects that may include surface and subterranean digging. Whether digging gardens or excavating for swimming pools, decks and similar projects, potentially hazardous interactions with underground utility lines always exist; dangers that can be greatly reduced with a simple call to 811 before digging.

PRC Pipeline Safety Bureau Chief Jason Montoya told those in attendance that a recent survey reveals that an astounding 45 percent of American homeowners polled admitted that they do not plan on calling 811 before they dig, essentially putting themselves and their communities at risk. “Calling 811 before digging reduces these risks to less than one percent,” Montoya stated. “Every six minutes, an underground utility line is damaged.”

PRC Chairwoman Karen Montoya read the proclamation designating April as Safe Digging Month, and thanked the industry representatives and members of the public in attendance for working hard to ensure safety of those working in the industry as well as the public at large, a sentiment later echoed by Commissioner Valerie Espinoza.

The PRC works directly with the state’s 811 call center, and is charged with enforcing federal and state pipeline safety regulations in order to provide for the safe operation of natural gas and hazardous liquid facilities. The bureau is also responsible for investigating intrastate pipeline incidents and accidents, enforcing excavation damage prevention laws and licensing crude oil, natural gas and oil and gas production pipelines.

The Pipeline Safety Bureau also conducts safety compliance reviews for private and municipal gas distribution systems, master meter gas systems, LPG systems, transmission systems and jurisdictional gathering lines.

The Bureau's annual pipeline safety report is available to the public through the PRC's website at www.nmprc.state.nm.us.

James Stanovcak, Executive Director of New Mexico 811, facilitated tours of the facility, and stated, "Our goal should be to reduce damage to nothing. It is realistic to want to be there. We can do that by focusing on that goal. People are starting to understand the dangers," Stanovcak stated, adding that calls to 811 before digging are increasing.

Jane Jernigan, Executive Director of the New Mexico Utility Contractors Association, introduced Digby the Safety Turtle, stating that the outreach mascot is used to visit children at elementary schools, especially those undergoing construction projects or that have projects nearby. Digby is used to educate children on the dangers of construction sites as well as digging where potential utility lines may exist.

About the NMPRC

The NMPRC regulates public utilities, telecommunications companies and motor carriers operating in the State of New Mexico. It also administers the State Fire Marshal's Office, the New Mexico Firefighters Training Academy in Socorro, N.M., and the Pipeline Safety Bureau.

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