

2020 End of Year Analysis



This report provides a summary and analysis of Washington's 2,496 damage events occurring in 2020, and a brief description about dig law complaints and training. To generate the most accurate analysis of damage events, it is important that damages are reported to Washington's Damage Incident Reporting Tool (DIRT) within the 45-day timeframe set forth in the statute.

The UTC delays pulling the DIRT information for each quarter to allow some extra time for the submitters to report. This analysis is based on the information found in the four quarterly reports and does not include DIRT reports that were grossly late.

A flex field was added to the UTC's DIRT report form to provide a designated section for the submitter to give specific contact information about the excavator who caused damage. Prior to the addition of the flex field, contact information could only be placed in the comments section of the DIRT form. Due to this change, the UTC has seen improvements in reporting information, especially related to damage to natural gas without a locate. In addition, the detail in reporting has significantly helped the UTC in its ability to accurately analyze the DIRT data for enforcement, education, and training.

Due to COVID-19, the UTC suspended its in person trainings in March and worked with the two companies who provided those classes to create on-line trainings. Locator training online was available in 2020 and Dig Safe training online was rolled out early 2021.



DIRT Form

The five root cause options on the DIRT form are:

1. Notification Issue
2. Locating Issue - Facility NOT marked
3. Locating Issue - Facility marked INACCURATELY
4. Excavation Issue
5. Miscellaneous

Two problematic issues with the root cause determinations are:

Under Excavation Issue, there is a selection choice of “Improper excavation practice not listed above”(meaning the submitter doesn’t believe the damage cause fits into any of the other categories). Unfortunately, there is not a comment requirement to determine what caused the damage, and it is the most used selection in the category.

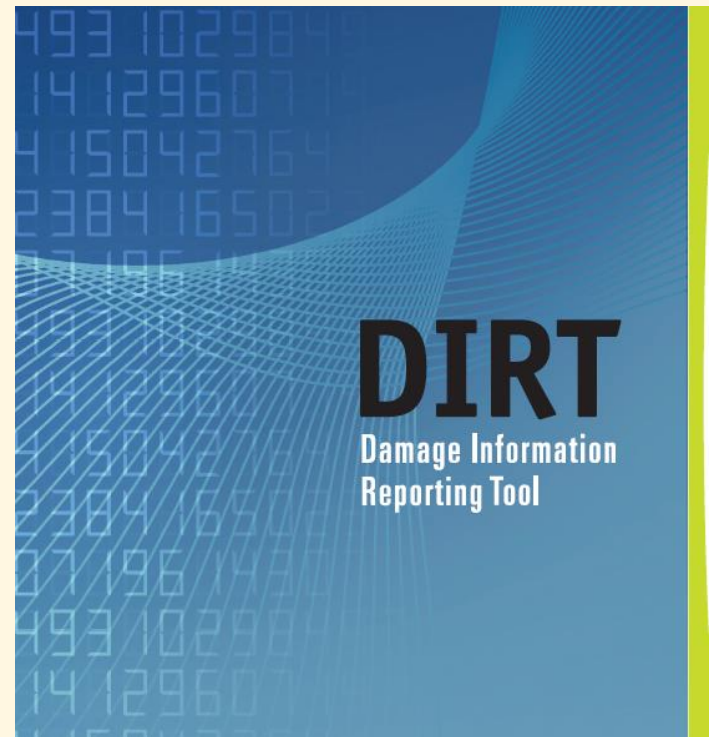
The Miscellaneous category has an option to choose “root cause not listed” with a requirement to leave a comment. When examining the comments, many times the correct root cause for the damage will correctly fit into another category.



2020 Damage Reporting

Who is reporting:

- Electric: 157
- Excavator: 179
- Natural Gas: 1624
- Public Works: 108
- Road Builder: 16
- Telecommunications: 296
- Water: 21
- Other: 95



It should be noted that facility operators and excavators are both required to submit DIRT reports for each damage event, as outlined in RCW 19.122.053(1). There continues to be a lack of duplicate reports in 2020, indicating both the facility operator and excavator are not submitting a report on the same damage. However, excavators submitted the highest number thus far. Because there are so few duplicates, both reports have been left in this report, as almost all of them have listed different root causes for the incident.



2020 Damage Picture

Damaged Facilities:

- Cable TV: 174
- Electric: 405
- Natural Gas: 1420
- Other (including Sewer and Liquid Pipelines): 44
- Telecommunications: 330
- Water: 123





Locate Requests by Year

For the first time in at least five years, requests for locates declined with **2,254 fewer** requests in 2020. We believe this is likely due to construction and excavation services unable to perform their work because of shutdowns related to Covid.

Year	Incoming Locate Requests	Outgoing Locate Transmissions
2014	353,296	2,904,807
2015	366,320	2,992,222
2016	398,003	3,274,468
2017	488,242	4,198,115
2018	534,550	4,779,815
2019	538,080	4,816,343
2020	535,826	4,778,004



Washington's 2020 Root Cause Damage Picture

One Call Notification Issue has jumped by 5 percent over last year making up 37% percent of the 2020 damages incidents, with 760 reports stating, "No notification made to the one call center" and 78 reports stating that the excavator dug after a valid ticket expired.

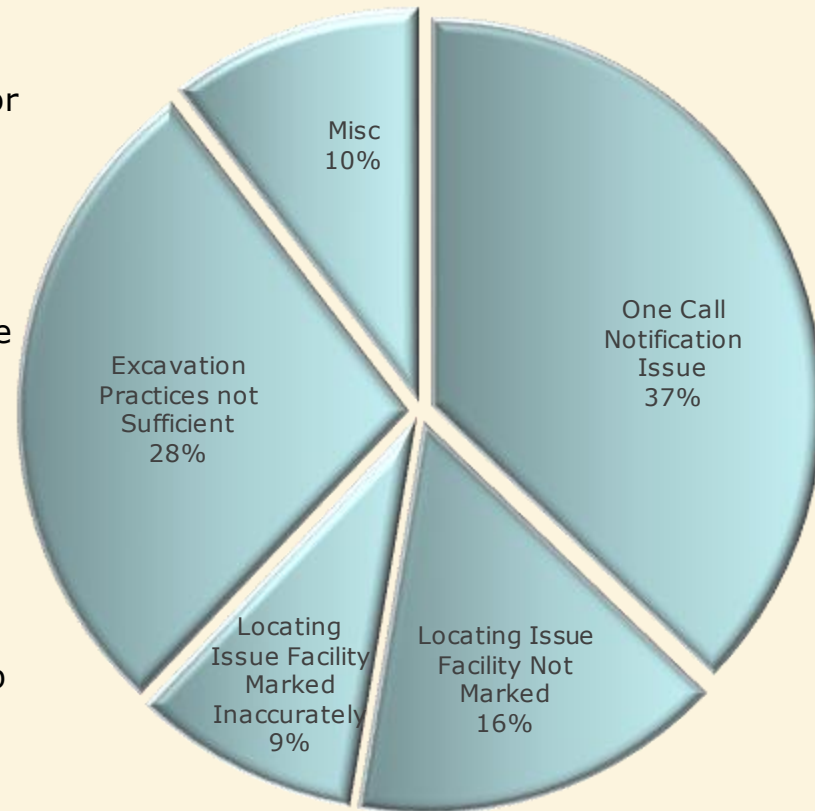
Excavation Practices accounts for 28 percent of the reported damages, with 278 damages reports listing "Improper excavation practices" as the main reason for the damage, 130 saying the "Excavator dug prior to verifying the marks (by pot-holing)", and another 147 stating that the "Excavator failed to maintain clearance."

Locating Issue – Facility Not Marked is at 16 percent of the reports received with 264 damage incidents stating damaged was because the utility was "Not marked due to locator error."

Locating Issue – Facility Marked Inaccurately makes up 9 percent of the damages with 264 incidents stating the facility was "Marked inaccurately due to locator error."

Miscellaneous Root Cause accounts for the last 10 percent damages with 235 reports stating that "Root Cause not listed." When this field is selected, the submitter is asked to provide a comment on the cause of the incident. Many times, the comment will identify another root cause that should have been selected. When submitting DIRT reports, the submitter should carefully identify the actual root cause so more relevant information can be analyzed about damage incidents and their cause.

Root Cause of Damage

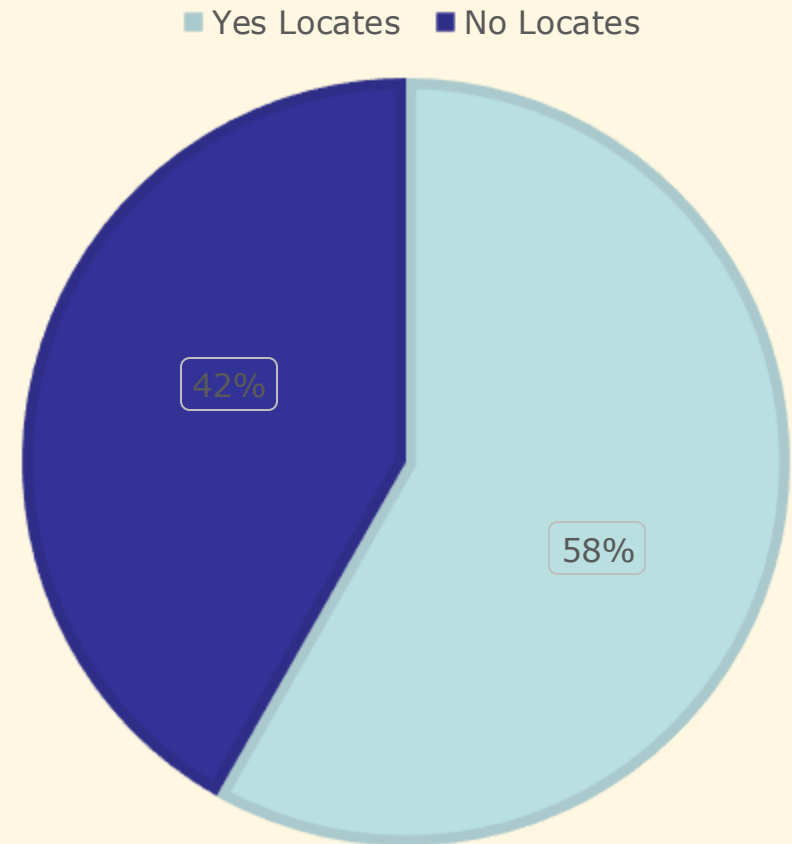




2020 Locate Requests

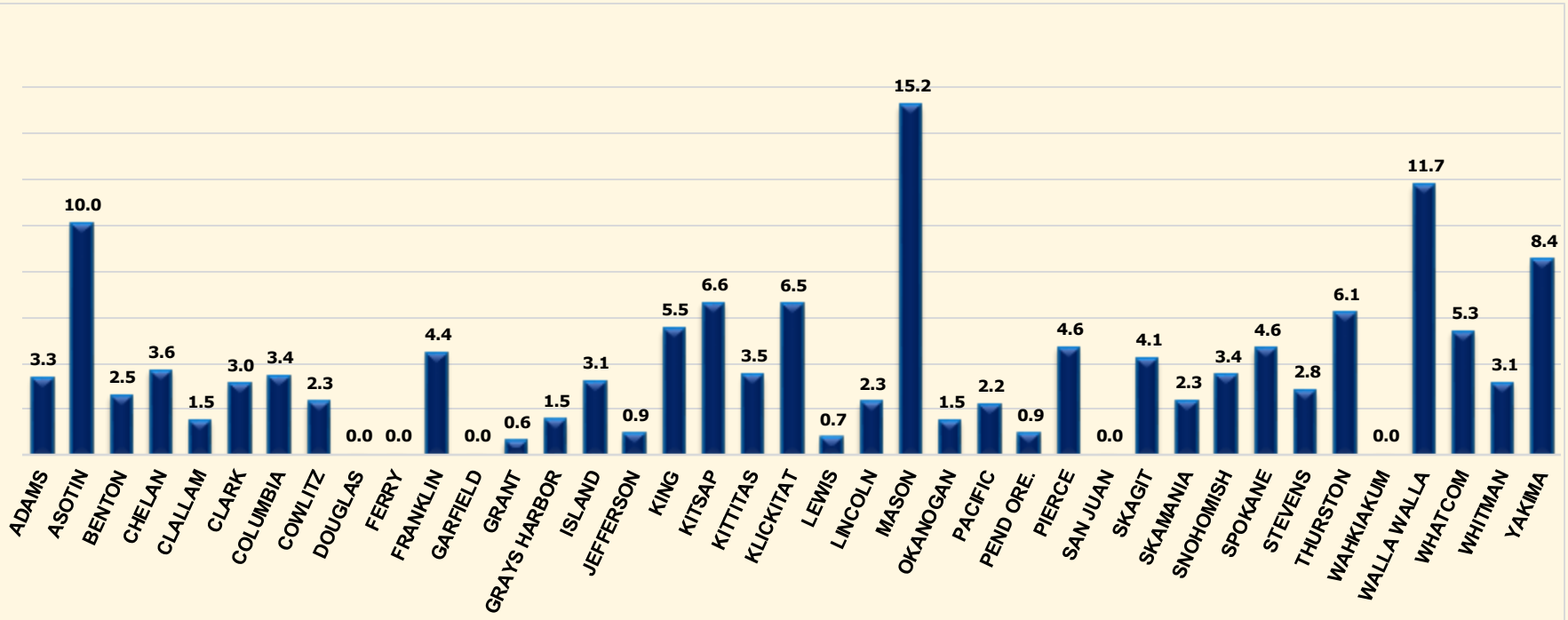
According to the 2,496 DIRT damage reports submitted in 2020, 58 percent indicate that a locate request was made prior to excavation. This is a slight drop from last year, and again we believe Covid may have played a role in the reduction, as well. It is likely that some people were more likely to skip requesting a locate, especially homeowners, who may have decided to do some DIY work around their homes.

Important Note: This is separate data point from the previous Root Causes page where there is a category for "No notification made to the one-call center / 811." This is a separate question on the DIRT form that allows the submitter to state whether there was a valid locate at the time of the incident. A person can identify a different root cause for the damage incident, and state also that there was not a valid locate request. For example, in 2020, we found 283 reports stating there was no locate request, yet the submitter used a different root cause for the damage.





2020 Damages by County



In 2020, there was an average of **4.7 damages per 1,000 locate requests** statewide. In 2015, there were seven counties showing over 10 damages per 1,000 locates and this year only three. It should also be noted that the smaller counties will at times look high due to less requests in their area and a few damages. However, every county can educate their community about the importance of getting locates prior to excavation, which will bring the numbers in this statistic downward.



2020 Complaints, Enforcement Actions

2020 was a challenging year for Enforcement for the UTC and the Washington Dig Law Safety Committee (Safety Committee). The Safety Committee's complaints were down in volume as a result. The committee then began using zoom and a call-in process to review complaints, resulting in 20 recommendation referrals to the UTC.

UTC staff were still able to performed 62 separate investigations, including the Safety Committee referrals, and damage occurring to natural gas or liquid pipelines without a locate in 2020. This resulted in \$79,000 in penalties being levied by the UTC, with many including the option for deferrals provided the incurs no additional violations for one year and/or completes National Utility Contractor Association (NUCA) Dig Safe training.

Because of the inability to hold in-person NUCA Dig Safe trainings, the UTC did not mandate the training portion for compliance to those who had not been able to attend a training prior to the Covid shut-down.

In addition, the UTC sent technical assistance warning letters to 284 professional excavators and 170 homeowners, who damaged natural gas facilities in 2020 without first securing a valid locate.



2020 Training

All fines collected through penalty assessments are deposited into the Damage Prevention Penalty Account which can only be used for educational purposes to improve worker and public safety relating to excavation and underground utilities.

The UTC in partnership with the Safety Committee was able to host only three in-person training classes before the state was shut-down for large group gatherings.

Three NUCA Dig Safe trainings were held in Seattle, Spokane and Colfax in early 2020. After the shut-down, the UTC, who had already been working with stakeholders and NUCA to develop an on-line Dig Safe Training, ramped up the efforts to get it done quicker. NUCA eventually developed an on-line Dig Safe training, and it was approved by the UTC. However, it was not rolled out until early 2021.

There were no in-person Staking University Locator trainings held in 2020, however, Staking University already had an on-line version, which we began offering in June 2020. There were 143 people who registered for the training in 2020. Unfortunately, we have found the on-line course to be very technical and difficult for some people to pass, resulting in a low completion rate of less than one-third. For this reason, we believe the best locator training is still the two-day training hands on training, with an instructor.



For questions about this report, please contact:

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