



Ohio 811 (OUPS) — Call Before You Dig, Online

Call Before You Dig, Online or by Phone (OUPS / OHIO811)

————— An Extended Guide · No. 1771 —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Here is the whole guide in a nutshell. Ohio law says that before you dig, even by hand, you must tell OHIO811, also known as OUPS. It is free. You can dial 811 or go to oups.org and use the online homeowner request called e-dig. Type the address yourself. Gather your address, the spot in the yard, the nearest cross street, your start date, and your tools. Ask at least two working days ahead, not counting the day you ask, weekends, or legal holidays, and no more than sixteen calendar days ahead. You will get a confirmation email with a reference number. Utilities then mark their lines with colored flags or paint. Wait for the replies, dig by hand near markings, and remember that your own private lines are not marked by the utilities. If any of it feels tangled, call me and we will do it together.

1. What Ohio 811 Actually Is

One free call or form keeps buried lines safe.

Under your lawn, driveway, and flower beds there is a hidden network. Electric lines, natural gas pipes, water and sewer lines, and telephone and cable wires all run underground. You cannot see them, and a shovel cannot tell the difference between soil and a gas pipe.

Ohio solved this problem with a shared service. The Ohio Utilities Protection Service, known as OUPS, goes by the public name OHIO811. When you tell them where you plan to dig, they pass the message to the utility companies that have lines in that area. Those companies then send someone to mark where their lines run.

The number 811 works like 911, but for digging. You dial it, or you fill out a form on the official website, and the notice goes out to everyone who needs to know. I wrote this guide to walk you through the online way, step by step, at a calm pace.

The service connects you to utility companies, but it does not dig or repair anything for you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Using the service is free. You are never charged to ask utilities to mark their lines. If a website asks for a fee just to file a basic homeowner request, close it and start over from the real site.

2. Why Ohio Law Asks You to Call

It protects you, your neighbors, and the workers who show up.

Hitting a buried line can be dangerous and expensive. A broken gas pipe can leak. A cut electric line can injure you. A cut water or sewer line can flood a yard. A cut phone or internet cable can leave a whole street offline for hours.

Because of this, Ohio law says the person doing the digging must notify OHIO811 before starting. It applies to big contractors, and it also applies to a homeowner with a hand shovel. The reason is simple. A free marking visit costs far less than the damage from a mistake.

- Notice is required even when you dig by hand.
- It protects your own home and your neighbors' services.
- It gives utility companies time to mark their lines.
- It is a legal requirement, not just a suggestion.

Following the rule also keeps you on the right side of any repair bills. If you skip the call and strike a line, you may be responsible for the cost of fixing it.

There is also a quiet benefit. When you make the request, you become part of a neighborhood habit of safety.

WATCH OUT

Think the ground looks plain, so there is nothing below? Lines are often buried only a short way down. Never guess. Make the request first, even for a small job.

3. What Counts as Digging

More jobs count than most people expect.

When people hear the word digging, they picture a backhoe. Ohio 811 means something much wider. Any time you break ground and move earth, you are excavating, and the notice rule applies. Hand digging counts too.

Here are everyday jobs where you should make a request first.

- Planting a tree or large shrub.
- Setting a mailbox post or fence posts.
- Building a deck, porch, or shed with footings.
- Installing a patio, walkway, or pond.
- Putting in a flagpole, clothesline pole, or swing set.
- Laying new drain pipe or landscaping edging that goes deep.

Surface work that does not break the soil, like raking leaves or mowing, does not need a request. Planting a small flower in a pot does not either. The question to ask yourself is whether you will be putting a tool into the ground beyond a light surface scratch.

If you are on the fence, a good rule of thumb is this. When a tool will go below the grass roots, you should make a request first. That includes small jobs that seem harmless, and jobs done only on a weekend afternoon.

TIP

If you are unsure whether your job counts, make the request anyway. It costs nothing, and the answer comes back as markings. Or call me at (330) 200-8042 and we can talk it through.

4. Who Has to Make the Call

The person who digs is the person who notifies.

Here is a point that surprises many homeowners. The official rule is that the person doing the excavation must be the one who notifies OHIO811. If you dig your own garden fence, that person is you. If you hire a crew, that person is the crew.

When you hire help, you should still ask, and I would encourage you to ask plainly. Before any work starts, say to the contractor, 'Have you already made the 811 request for my property?' A good contractor will say yes and may offer the reference number.

- 1 If you dig yourself, you make the request.
- 2 If you hire a contractor, ask whether they made it.
- 3 Ask to see the reference number or confirmation.
- 4 Do not allow digging to start until you are satisfied.

This protects you. A reputable company already knows the process and does not mind the question. Their answer should be quick and confident.

If you are not sure whether your helper filed a request, simply ask for the number. It takes a minute.

GOOD TO KNOW

A neighbor doing a favor, such as a nephew with a post-hole digger, still counts as the person digging. They should make the request, or you can make it together in your own name and share the confirmation.

5. The Two Working Day Rule

Waiting is part of the process, and it is short.

After you tell OHIO811 about your project, the utility companies need time to send someone out. Ohio sets that time at two working days. The official site explains that the count does not include the day you make your request.

It also does not include weekends or legal holidays. So a request made on a Friday does not start its count until Monday. Think of it as business days only, with your own request day set aside.

- The day you submit does not count.
- Saturdays and Sundays do not count.
- Legal holidays do not count.
- Utilities have those two working days to mark their lines.

Plan ahead when you can. If you want to put in a fence on a Saturday, do not file your request on Thursday and hope for the best. Give yourself a comfortable cushion so the markings are in the ground before the job begins.

A holiday in the middle of the week stretches the wait, so look at a calendar first.

TIP

Count on a calendar with a pencil. Cross out your request day, then count two working days forward. Your dig day should be after that second day, once you have checked the replies.

6. The Sixteen Day Window

You cannot ask too early, either.

Ohio has a time limit on the other side too. The official homeowner page says to notify at least two working days ahead, but not more than sixteen calendar days before you plan to dig. That is a window, with a start and an end.

Why a limit? Markings fade, flags get knocked over, and mowing or weather can wipe them out. A request made too far ahead may leave you with markings that no longer mean what they say.

A good approach is to choose your digging date first, then work backward. Pick a day roughly a week before, and file your request then. That leaves you well inside the window and gives utilities their time.

- Earliest: sixteen calendar days before you dig.
- Latest: at least two working days before you dig.

- If your plans slip past the window, file a fresh request.

Most people find that filing about a week ahead is a comfortable middle. It is early enough to allow for a holiday, yet close enough that the flags will still be fresh when you begin.

WATCH OUT

If rain or a delay pushes your job back by weeks, do not rely on old markings. Call or file again so the markings are current before any shovel goes in.

7. Before You Start: What to Gather

Five minutes of preparation makes the form easy.

The online form asks simple questions, but it is easier when your answers are ready. OHIO811 lists the kinds of information it needs on its homeowner page. Collect these in advance and write them on a piece of paper next to the computer.

- Your name and a phone number or email where you can be reached.
- The street address where you will dig.
- Where on the property the digging will happen, such as front yard, backyard, or side of the house.
- The nearest cross street and about how far the site is from it.
- The date you want to begin.
- The kind of work, and the tools you will use.

The site also offers an excavation checklist you can download and print. It is a helpful way to organize your answers. You can find it on the homeowner page of the official site.

An email address you can open matters most, since the confirmation arrives there.

Keep the paper list for later too, since you may need the same facts if you phone.

TIP

Walk the yard first. Stand where you plan to dig and picture the exact spot. It is much easier to describe a location you have just looked at.

8. Getting to the Real Website

Type the address yourself.

Always start at the official site. The Ohio Utilities Protection Service website is oups.org, and the service uses the public name OHIO811. Type oups.org into the address bar at the top of your browser yourself, rather than clicking a link in an email or text.

Look for the homeowner section. The page is titled for homeowners, and it explains when to notify, how to contact, and what happens afterward. From there you will find the online option for homeowners, called e-dig.

- 1 Open your web browser.
- 2 Click in the long address bar at the top.
- 3 Type oups.org and press Enter.
- 4 Look for the Homeowners link in the menu.
- 5 Choose the option to submit a dig notification online.

Because this site handles your home address, it is worth being careful about copycats. Imitation sites sometimes run ads that appear above the real result in a search.

On the home page you may see menus for professionals and for homeowners. Choose the homeowner path. You will not need any of the professional tools.

WATCH OUT

A site that charges you to file a normal homeowner request is not the official service. The real service does not ask for your bank card number, your Social Security number, or a gift card.

9. Phone or Online: Choosing Your Way

Both reach the same service.

You have two ways to tell OHIO811 about your project. You can dial 811 on your telephone, or you can submit a request online. Both lead to the same list of utility companies and the same markings.

Calling has its comforts. A real person takes your information and reads it back to you. Routine requests are taken on weekdays during business hours, and emergencies are answered at any hour. The alternate number printed on the official site is 800-362-2764.

Online has its own advantages. You can take your time, check your typing, and avoid being on hold. The form is open at any hour, so you can fill it in on a quiet Sunday evening and still count your working days from the next business day.

- Phone: speak with someone, good if you like a conversation.
- Online: go at your own speed, good if you like to see your answers.
- Either way, you receive a reference number.

Either route leaves you with a confirmation, and that is what matters most.

GOOD TO KNOW

Neither way is better. Pick the one that feels comfortable. This guide covers the online way, but if the form frustrates you, simply dial 811.

10. What e-dig Is, and Who It Fits

The homeowner's online request.

OHIO811 offers two online tools. One is called i-dig, built for professional excavators and utility companies who file many requests. The other is called e-dig, and it is meant for homeowners.

e-dig is a straightforward online dig request. The official site describes it as designed for a single address, so it fits a normal home project in one yard. If your project spans several properties or a long stretch, a phone call is a better path.

- e-dig is for homeowners with one address.
- It is for non-emergency work, planned ahead.
- i-dig is the professional version, with accounts and training.
- If you are not sure which, the Homeowners page points the way.

As a homeowner, you do not need to create an account to use e-dig. You fill in the form, send it, and wait for your confirmation email. That makes it feel like sending an ordinary online order form.

If the form seems not to fit your project, that is a hint to phone instead.

WATCH OUT

Emergencies are different. If you have already struck a line or smell gas, do not sit at a computer. Leave the area and call 911. Online forms are for planned work only.

11. Filling Out the Online Form, Step by Step

Go slowly. Nothing is final until you send it.

When you open e-dig, you will see a form with boxes to fill in. Each screen may look a little different over time, so I describe the general shape rather than exact labels. Read each prompt before typing.

- 1 From the OHIO811 Homeowners page, choose the option to start an online dig notification.
- 2 Enter your name and your contact details.

- 3 Enter the address of your dig site.
- 4 Describe where on the property you will dig.
- 5 Enter the nearest cross street and the distance from it.
- 6 Give the date you plan to begin.
- 7 Describe the kind of work and the tools you will use.
- 8 Read everything over, then submit.

If a box is marked as required, the form will not let you continue without it. If you make an error, you can usually go back and correct it before you send.

When it is accepted, you should see a confirmation on the screen and receive an email.

Take a breath before you press the final button, and look back over each answer once more.

TIP

Keep your paper list beside you. Read each answer from the paper into the box, so you are not trying to remember things while you type.

12. Describing Where You Will Dig

Clear location details save everyone a return trip.

The marking crews arrive with only your description to go on. They may never meet you. So a clear note about the spot matters more than anything else on the form.

Start with the address. Then say which part of the property: front yard, backyard, left side of the house when facing it, or near the driveway. If the site is a corner lot, say which street the dig is nearest.

The form also asks for the nearest cross street and how far you are from it. A rough distance is fine, like about two hundred feet. You do not need a measuring tape for this, but a sensible guess helps.

- Name the part of the lot: front, back, side.
- Mention nearby landmarks, like a garage or a big oak.
- State the nearest cross street.
- Add a short note if the spot is hard to find.

If you are not sure which side of the house you mean, stand at the street facing your front door. Left and right are then easy to tell, and you can describe the spot just as a visitor would find it.

GOOD TO KNOW

If your dig is only in one corner, say so. Utilities then mark near that corner rather than the whole property, which helps keep your lawn tidy.

13. Describing the Work and the Tools

What and how you will dig.

The form asks what kind of work you are doing and what tools you will use. It sounds like a small detail, but it helps utilities understand how deep and how wide your project may go.

Be honest and plain. For a fence, say fence installation. For a tree, say planting a tree. For tools, say hand shovel, post-hole digger, power auger, or whatever you really plan to use. A power auger reaches deeper than a hand spade, and the utilities should know.

- Type of work: fence, tree, deck, mailbox, pond.
- Tools: shovel, hand digger, power auger, or machine.
- Whether you are digging for yourself or on behalf of an owner.

The form also asks if you are doing the work for yourself or for someone else. Answer truthfully. The person who performs the excavation is the one responsible for notifying, as the official page explains.

There is no wrong answer when you are being truthful. The form is not a test, and nobody will judge a small project. It simply helps the right people understand what to expect.

TIP

If your plans change from a shovel to a machine, update your request or file a new one. The tools you tell them about should be the tools you actually bring.

14. Your Confirmation Email

The proof that your request went through.

A moment after you submit, OHIO811 sends a confirmation email. The official page says this arrives as soon as your notification is processed. It is the single most important message in the whole process, so look for it.

The email lists the utility companies that were notified about your project. It also includes a reference number. Think of it as a receipt. It proves you made your request and when.

- Look in your inbox first.
- If you do not see it, check Spam or Junk.

- Search for the word OHIO811.
- Make sure you typed your email address correctly on the form.

If nothing arrives after a reasonable wait, do not just start digging. A missing confirmation means you cannot be sure the request was received. Dial 811 and ask them to check, or file again.

Inside the message you will find your reference number. Think of it as a tracking number for a package. Write it in a notebook, give it to any contractor working for you, and keep it handy in case you call OHIO811 with a question about your request. It is not a password, but it belongs with your project papers.

TIP

Print the email or save it as a PDF. Put the paper in a folder labeled with your project. If a question comes up later, you can show exactly what you filed.

15. Marking Your Dig Site in White

A small step that helps the crews.

Before the utility crews arrive, it can help to show them where you plan to dig. The color code for this is white, which stands for proposed excavation. You can mark your own site with white paint, flags, or stakes.

This is optional for many homeowners, but it removes guesswork. If your project is a fence, mark the line where posts will go. If it is a tree, mark a circle at the spot. The crew then knows to mark lines in that area.

- 1 Decide the exact outline of your dig.
- 2 Use white marking paint or white flags.
- 3 Outline the area or mark the line of the fence.
- 4 Do this before the utility crews are due.

White is reserved for the dig site. Other colors belong to the utilities, so please do not use them yourself.

If you cannot make marks yourself, a family member can help. Many homeowners find it easier to do this on the morning they file, while the plan is fresh in mind.

TIP

Marking paint made for outdoor use is sold at hardware stores. A bag of small white flags works well on grass. Choose washable, temporary paint, not paint that stays on your driveway.

16. While You Wait

The two days go quicker than you think.

Once your request is in, the next step is patience. Utility companies receive notice of your project and send locators to mark their lines. They may come on the first day, the second day, or anywhere between. You usually do not need to be home.

Use the wait to prepare. Gather your tools, confirm your plan, and double-check your start date. This is also a good time to talk with your contractor, if you have one, and share the confirmation email.

- Do not dig yet, even a little.
- Do not remove any flags or paint that appear.
- Keep pets and children away from fresh markings.
- Watch your email for updates.

It can feel strange to see colored flags appear in your yard without anyone knocking. That is normal. Crews often work quietly, and you may only notice the results later.

If you have a question during the wait, such as whether a crew has been out, you can look up your ticket on the official website with your reference number. Checking is better than guessing.

WATCH OUT

Digging early because the weather is nice is the exact mistake the waiting period is built to prevent. Wait until your reply emails say the work is complete, or the full time has passed.

17. Positive Response: Utilities Reply

How you learn who has marked and who has not.

OHIO811 uses a system called Positive Response. It is a fancy name for a simple idea. Each utility company reports back on your ticket, saying what it did. You then know the status of every line before you dig.

The official page says that when the notification period ends, you receive an email with the status from each notified utility. Each company may say that its lines were marked, that it has no lines in your area, or that it needs more time.

- Read the email from top to bottom.
- Look for each utility on your list.
- A company with no lines in your area will say so.

- A company that has marked will confirm that.

You can also check a ticket on the OHIO811 website using your reference number, if you want to see it for yourself.

Do not worry about the technical name. All it means is that you get an answer from each company, instead of silence. Print the replies and keep them with your confirmation, so you can show exactly who responded and what they said.

GOOD TO KNOW

If one company has not replied, do not assume it is fine. Call OHIO811 and ask. They can contact the utility for you.

18. Reading the Color Codes

Each color has one meaning.

Utility markings follow a standard set of colors used in Ohio. The official homeowner page lists them. Learning them takes a minute, and it helps you understand what you are looking at.

- White: the proposed dig site.
- Pink: temporary survey markings.
- Red: electric power lines, cables, conduit, and lighting cables.
- Yellow: gas, oil, steam, petroleum, or gaseous materials.
- Orange: communication, alarm, or signal lines.
- Blue: drinking water.
- Purple: reclaimed water, irrigation, or slurry lines.
- Green: sewers and drain lines.

The markings may also include letters, numbers, and arrows. These give extra facts, such as the owner of the line, what it is made of, or which direction it runs.

A few more details are worth knowing. Some markings are painted directly on the ground, while others are shown by flags in the same colors. If you see two colors close together, you may have two different utilities running side by side. Always treat every color as a warning, and keep your tools well away until you have studied the whole pattern. If a color is faded and you cannot tell what it was, ask OHIO811 to help.

TIP

Take a photo of the markings with your phone before you begin. If paint fades or gets disturbed, you have a record of where the lines were.

19. Flags, Paint, and Stakes

What you will see in the yard.

Crews use three common tools to mark lines. Flags are small wire stakes with a colored plastic flag. Paint is sprayed on grass, soil, or pavement. Stakes are small wooden markers. You may see a mix of all three.

On a lawn, you will often see a line of colored flags running across the yard. On a driveway or sidewalk, you will see painted lines and arrows. Do not worry if your yard suddenly looks like a parade. The marks are temporary.

- Flags are easy to see, but can be knocked over by mowers.
- Paint is quick, but can fade with rain and traffic.
- Stakes are sturdier, and sometimes used near trees.

Walk the yard slowly and look at the pattern. A line that runs from the street to your house is likely a service line, bringing a utility into your home.

Lines may run straight, but they may also curve or turn corners. Follow each line with your eyes from end to end before you decide where to put your first shovel.

WATCH OUT

Do not pull up flags or scrub away paint to tidy your yard. The official site asks that you not remove, destroy, or replace markings while your project is underway.

20. Digging Carefully Near Markings

The tolerance zone and hand tools.

A marking shows the center of a line, not its edges. Lines have width, and a marking can be slightly off. For this reason, Ohio has a safety space around every marked line. It is called the tolerance zone.

The official site describes it as the width of the line plus eighteen inches on each side.

Inside that zone, you should dig by hand with care, using soft methods. Do not use a power auger or machine inside it.

- 1 Measure eighteen inches out from each side of the marking.
- 2 Use a hand shovel inside that zone.
- 3 Dig a little at a time and look closely.
- 4 Stop if you see a pipe, wire, or warning tape.

If your fence post or tree falls squarely on a marked line, consider moving the plan a little. A shift of a few feet can save a great deal of trouble.

Hand digging is slow, and that is the whole point. Use a regular shovel or a spade, and lift the soil in small amounts. Looking at each scoop can reveal tape, sand, or a pipe before you touch it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Warning tape buried above a line is a clue that something important lies below it. If you spot colored tape in the soil, stop and call for help.

21. Private Lines Are Your Responsibility

The lines 811 does not mark.

Here is one of the most important facts in this guide. The utility companies mark the lines they own and operate. But some lines belong to you, the homeowner, and those are generally not marked by the utility.

Think about a detached garage with its own electric feed, a lamp post in the yard, a buried line to a shed, an invisible dog fence, a sprinkler system, or a private water line from a well. You or a past owner may have paid for these. The utility did not install them and may not map them.

- Buried wiring to a garage, barn, or shed.
- Yard lights and lamp posts.
- Sprinkler and irrigation pipes.
- Private water lines and well lines.
- Gas lines running to a grill or pool heater.

The official site says privately owned lines are the responsibility of the homeowner. If you think you have additional lines in your dig area, a private locating company can find them. This one surprises many neighbors, so it is worth reading twice.

WATCH OUT

A clean yard after the marking visit does not mean nothing is buried there. Think about what runs beyond your meter or beyond the point where the utility's line ends.

22. Finding a Private Locator

Help for the lines on your side of the meter.

A private utility locator is a business that finds and marks buried lines that the public utilities will not. They use electronic equipment to trace pipes and wires. Their service is not part of the free 811 request, so you arrange it separately and may pay them.

OHIO811 keeps a page listing private utility locators on its website. That page is a good starting place, since it is on the official site. It is better than picking a name from a random search ad.

- 1 Open oups.org and look for Private Utility Locating.
- 2 Find a company that serves Portage County.
- 3 Call and describe what lines you believe you have.
- 4 Ask about price and timing before you agree.
- 5 Schedule the visit well before your dig date.

Prices vary, so ask for the cost in plain words before you say yes. Ask them to explain what they will mark and how.

Some homeowners share the cost by hiring a locator for several jobs in one visit. If a neighbor is also planning a project, you might ask whether a single visit could cover you both.

TIP

Old house plans, deed papers, or notes from the previous owner can point to where private lines were buried. Bring them out when the locator visits.

23. When No Markings Appear

Not seeing flags is a clue to check.

Sometimes the two working days pass and your yard still looks untouched. Do not assume that means the ground is clear. There are a few ordinary reasons, and the official site gives guidance.

First, check your Positive Response email and see whether each utility replied. A utility may have reported that it has no lines in your area. That is a perfectly good reason for no markings from that company.

- Read the replies for each listed utility.
- Look around for meters or pipes that suggest a utility.
- If a utility replied but left no marks, ask OHIO811.

- Remember that private lines are not marked by utilities.

The official page also notes that above-ground clues, such as a gas meter, may mean a utility is present. If you see such clues but no markings of that type, a private locator may be needed.

Notes help here. Write down which utilities you saw on the confirmation list and which ones you see marked. Then compare the two lists. Any company that neither marked nor replied is the one to ask about.

WATCH OUT

Never start digging because no markings are visible. Silence is not permission. Confirm the replies first, and call 811 if anything is unclear.

24. When Markings Wash Away

Rain, mowing, and traffic happen.

Spring storms, lawn crews, and snow plows can remove flags and paint before your project starts. When that happens, you do not need to guess where the lines were.

The official OHIO811 site says that if markings are destroyed, removed, or no longer visible, you can make a free call to have the utilities notified again. Having your reference number ready makes that call go more smoothly.

- 1 Stop work and do not dig.
- 2 Find your confirmation email and reference number.
- 3 Dial 811 or use the number printed on the official site.
- 4 Explain that the markings are gone.
- 5 Wait for the new markings before digging.

Your earlier photos of the markings can help you describe where they were. A new set of markings should arrive within the same kind of waiting period.

Do not try to repaint the lines yourself from memory. Only the utility's own crew can mark a line properly, and a wrong guess is worse than no mark at all. Wait for the fresh markings, even if it delays your plans by a few days.

WATCH OUT

Ask your lawn service to avoid the marked area, or flag it with a note. Many mowers cannot tell a utility flag from a toy.

25. If You Hire a Contractor

Ask the question before they start.

Many seniors hire out fence, deck, and landscaping work. That is wise, but it is also a place where the 811 step can get lost. Under Ohio law, the person doing the work must notify OHIO811. Your job as the homeowner is to make sure it happened.

A short, polite question does the job. Before the crew arrives, ask for the 811 reference number. A professional can usually give it right away. If they answer vaguely, ask for it again, or file your own request as well.

- Ask for the reference number in writing.
- Check that the date fits the two working day rule.
- Look for markings in the yard before work starts.
- Do not pressure the crew to skip the wait.

It is also fine to file your own request in addition to theirs. A second notice does no harm and may give you the confirmation that you want for your records.

Keep a copy of the number for your own file. Contractors change crews and schedules, and having the number yourself means you can always check on your own request later.

WATCH OUT

A contractor who says 811 is not needed for a small job is wrong. The law covers hand digging too. Consider that a warning about the rest of their work.

26. If You Hit a Line

Stop, step back, and call for help.

Accidents happen, even to careful people. If your shovel strikes something that is not soil, such as a pipe, a wire, or a hard plastic casing, the most important thing is to stay calm.

Follow these steps from the official guidance.

- 1 Stop digging immediately and shut off any equipment.
- 2 Move away from the area.
- 3 Call 911 for any emergency, such as a gas leak, fire, or injury.
- 4 Notify OHIO811 so the affected utilities can be told.
- 5 Do not try to repair the line yourself.

Then wait for professionals. Whether it is a small nick or a clean break, a damaged line should be inspected by the company that owns it.

Report even a minor scrape. A line that looks fine may be weakened, and the owner needs the chance to check it.

If you ever smell the rotten-egg odor of natural gas, hear hissing from the ground, or see a broken line, leave the area on foot right away. Call 911 from a safe distance, such as a neighbor's yard. The online request is for planned work only, so never use a form in an emergency.

WATCH OUT

Do not cover a damaged line back up and hope for the best. Hidden damage can become a leak or a hazard later, long after you have forgotten the job.

27. Flags in Your Yard You Did Not Order

Not every marking is about your project.

Some mornings you may find colored flags or paint in your yard, and you did not file any request. This is common and usually harmless. Utility owners mark their own right-of-way when digging happens nearby.

The official page explains that markings on your property do not necessarily mean work will take place on your property. Flags and paint could point to planned improvements or nearby excavation, such as a neighbor's project or a street repair.

- Do not remove, destroy, or replace the markings.
- Look at the colors to learn which utilities are involved.
- Check the Near Ticket feature on the OHIO811 site or app.
- Ask a neighbor if they are having work done.

Near Ticket shows excavations close to your location, based on your position. It can help you learn what is happening on your street.

If you want to be sure, compare the flags against the colors in this guide. Blue flags near the street may point to a water main, while yellow ones may point to gas. That tells you which company is involved.

TIP

If nobody seems to know and the markings worry you, call the number on the official site. They can help you work out what the flags mean.

28. The OHIO811 Mobile App

Request tools in your pocket.

OHIO811 offers a mobile app for phones and tablets. The official site describes it as giving access to online notifications and other tools, including Positive Response and Near Ticket. You can use it from your yard, standing right at the dig site.

The app is optional. Everything it does can be done on the website or by phone. Some people like having it close, and others prefer a computer with a bigger screen.

- 1 Open your phone's app store.
- 2 Search for OHIO811.
- 3 Check that the publisher is the Ohio Utilities Protection Service.
- 4 Install it and open it.
- 5 Look for the online dig notification option.

The official OHIO811 website links to the app from its pages, which is the safest way to find the right one. Be careful of similar-sounding apps from other makers.

For many people, the app is simply a quick way to reach the same online form while standing in the yard. If you prefer a larger screen and bigger print, nothing is lost by sticking with the website on a computer.

WATCH OUT

Install only the app linked from oups.org. An app asking for payment, or for unrelated personal details, is not the right one.

29. Scams and Safe Habits

Keep your guard up around anything about utilities.

Scammers like utility topics, because people worry about safety and shutoffs. A few simple habits protect you. The real service has no reason to ask for your passwords, your bank details, or a payment in gift cards.

- Type oups.org yourself; do not click links in texts or emails.
- Look for the real address in your browser.
- Never pay a fee to file a basic homeowner request.
- Never give a one-time code to someone who calls you.
- Be wary of door-to-door workers who claim to be 'utility locators' and ask for money.

Marking visits by real utility crews are free and usually quiet. A stranger who knocks, says your lines are in danger, and offers urgent paid work deserves caution.

If a call or message feels wrong, hang up and contact the service yourself using the number on the official site.

If you are ever unsure, a good test is to ask yourself whether you started the contact. If you filed a request and an email arrives from OHIO811 about it, that makes sense. If a stranger reaches out first, be careful.

WATCH OUT

No real agency demands gift cards or asks for your password or a one-time code over the phone. If someone does, stop and call me or a trusted family member.

30. Helping a Parent or Neighbor

Do it with them, not instead of them.

Many families help older relatives with a yard project. That is kind, and the 811 step is a perfect thing to share. Sit down together at the computer, open the official site, and let your loved one see each screen.

Use their own email address for the confirmation, so the message reaches them. If you are the one digging, the request can be in your name, but share the confirmation so the homeowner has a copy.

- Open oups.org together.
- Read each question aloud and decide the answer.
- Let the homeowner type their own email.
- Print the confirmation and keep it in a folder.
- Make a note of the dig date on the calendar.

If the person you are helping would rather not use a computer, calling 811 works just as well, and you can sit beside them.

Keep the tone relaxed. The person you are helping knows their yard better than you do, and their knowledge about where things were buried over the years can be valuable. Ask what they remember about old pipes, wires, and past projects.

TIP

A family member who lives far away can still help by phone. Ask them to talk you through the form while you sit at the keyboard.

31. Using a Library Computer

No home computer is no problem.

If you do not have a computer or internet at home, the Portage County District Library branches and many senior centers offer computers you can use for free. The 811 form works the same there as at home, though you should be careful with your email.

Because the confirmation goes to your email, you will need to sign in to your email on the library computer to read it. That is fine as long as you sign out completely when you finish.

- Bring your paper list of information.
- Bring your email address and password.
- Sign out of your email and close the browser when done.
- Do not let the computer save your password.
- Print the confirmation, or write down the reference number.

Librarians are used to helping with forms and printing. Ask if you need help finding the print option.

Call the branch ahead if you can, to ask about hours and whether a computer needs to be reserved. A short phone call can save you a trip.

TIP

If you would rather not log into email on a shared machine, call 811 from your own phone instead. You can give the operator your phone number and ask for the reference number to be read to you.

32. Making Text Easier to Read

Bigger print helps with forms.

Government and utility pages can have small print. You do not need to squint. Every browser can enlarge a page, and the change usually stays set for that site.

- On a computer, hold Ctrl (or Command on a Mac) and press the plus key.
- Press Ctrl and zero to return to normal size.
- On a phone or tablet, spread two fingers to zoom in.
- Your device's settings can raise text size everywhere.

Larger text can make it easier to be sure you typed your address correctly. A wrong house number on a dig request could send the marking crew to the wrong yard, so accuracy matters more than speed.

Take a moment before you press submit to read each answer aloud. It catches mistakes better than reading silently.

Some people also like to change the browser's text size permanently. Look in the browser's settings menu for a page zoom or font size option. A few minutes of setup can make every website easier on your eyes, not only this one.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a form feels too cramped even when enlarged, try a tablet or a larger computer screen. Or use the phone option, where a person types for you.

33. Keeping Your Records

Paper proof is peace of mind.

After the project is done, keep what you collected. A small folder holds everything you need if a question ever comes up. If a neighbor, an insurance agent, or a contractor asks whether you notified OHIO811, you can answer with confidence.

- The confirmation email, printed or saved as a PDF.
- Your reference number written in a notebook.
- The Positive Response emails.
- Photos of the markings before you dug.
- The date you filed and the date you started.

Keep these for a good while. If a line is damaged long after you finish, these papers show you followed the proper process.

Digital copies are handy, but they can get deleted. A paper copy in a folder at home is the sturdiest record.

If you do projects often, consider a single notebook with one page per project. Write the date, the reference number, and a line about what was marked. Over the years it becomes a handy history of your property, and a future owner may thank you for it.

TIP

Label the folder with the project, such as Back fence. When you plan the next job, you will see exactly how you did it before.

34. Plain Questions and Answers

The things neighbors ask me most.

Q: Does it cost anything to ask? A: No. Notifying OHIO811 is free. Private locating, for lines the utilities do not mark, is separate.

Q: How long do I wait? A: At least two working days, not counting the day you ask, weekends, or legal holidays. Do not ask more than sixteen calendar days ahead.

Q: Can I just call instead? A: Yes. Dial 811. Routine requests are taken on weekdays during business hours.

Q: Is the online form only for homeowners? A: The e-dig tool is for homeowners with one address. Professionals use i-dig.

Q: What if my project is small? A: Hand digging still requires a request.

Q: Who marks my own buried wires? A: Not the utilities. A private locator can help.

Q: Do I need an account to file online? A: Not for the homeowner tool. You fill in the form and wait for your confirmation. Q: What if I forgot to file? A: Stop digging, and file now. It is never too late to do the right thing before the shovel goes in.

TIP

If your question is not here, call me at (330) 200-8042. I am happy to talk through your project, one step at a time.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

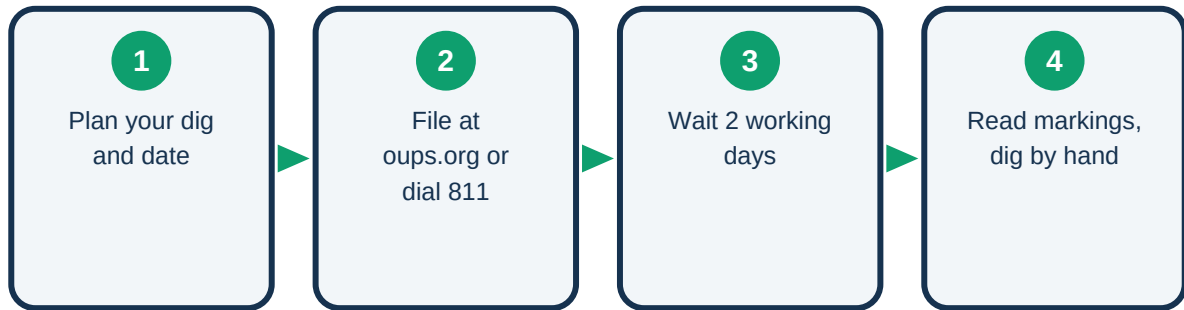
Keep this by the computer. I want to... Start a request: type oups.org yourself, or dial 811. Use the online form: choose the homeowner option called e-dig. Know when to ask: at least two working days ahead, and no more than sixteen calendar days. Prove I asked: keep the confirmation email and reference number. Read the markings: red electric, yellow gas, orange communication, blue water, green sewer, white dig site. Find private lines: use a private locator. Smell gas: leave and call 911. Get help: call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Call Before You Dig

Four steps from idea to safe digging.



Free to ask, and it is the law.

Illustration - details vary by device, plan, and provider. Always check your own setup.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Marking Colors

What the flags and paint mean.

Power & Gas	Water & Sewer	Your Dig
Red: electric Yellow: gas Orange: phone/cable	Blue: water Green: sewer Purple: irrigation	White: dig site Pink: survey Dig by hand nearby

Standard colors used by Ohio utilities.

Illustration - details vary by device, plan, and provider. Always check your own setup.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.