

Sewer & Septic Line Investigation Project

We're working to keep gas and sewer lines clear and safe.

Overview

While most problems with sewer and septic lines at work or at home are caused by tree roots or line breaks, there is a chance that the problem may be caused by the inadvertent installation of a natural gas line through a sewer or septic line.

In 2010 we began a multi-year project to identify and correct any situations where a natural gas line had been inadvertently installed through a sewer or septic line. While a natural gas line intersecting a sewer or septic line poses no immediate danger, the equipment used to unclog sewer or septic lines can penetrate the natural gas line and lead to the dangerous release of natural gas.

As part of the sewer/septic line investigation project, we have done over 100,000 inspections since the project began in 2010.

In-line Camera Inspection Process

1. We review maps and records to identify and correct any conflicts between our underground natural gas distribution system and sewer and septic lines. Based on the results of these inspections, some areas may require an in-line camera inspection.
2. If an in-line camera inspection of a sewer or septic line is necessary, we contact customers by phone or letter to let them know that contract crews will be working in their area. In most cases, camera investigations take place through the main sewer line and contract crews will not need access to homes or businesses. If the potential conflict involves a septic line, it will more likely be necessary to work with the home or business owner to arrange for an in-line camera inspection.
3. If our camera inspection reveals a conflict, we will notify the customer and state regulators. If the conflict is with our natural gas or electric system, we will repair it within 14 days. Repairs and site restoration will be provided at no cost to customers.
4. If it is determined that conflicts exist between sewer/septic lines and other underground utilities, such as telephone, cable, or other electric utilities, we will notify the customer and make every effort to contact the other companies. Customers will need to coordinate any repairs of non-Xcel Energy conflicts directly with those companies.

Horizontal Directional Drilling

We use underground “horizontal directional drilling” to install most natural gas lines beneath streets, driveways, and trees in order to minimize damage. This approach is commonly used in the utility industry because it has significantly less impact on the environment and our customers than open trenching.

Before horizontal directional drilling occurs, utility companies work to locate other underground services. However, many vintage sewer and septic lines are not “locatable” (identifiable from above ground), because they are made of clay and contain no tracer wire. In those cases, natural gas lines may have been inadvertently installed through a sewer or septic line.

Horizontal directional drilling practices have changed a great deal in recent years, and now use techniques that are able to detect contacts with sewer and septic lines at the time of the installation of a natural gas line.

Sewer Line/Gas Line Illustration

