

The Western Virginia Damage Prevention Committee met on Tuesday, August 11, 2009. There were 23 persons present. The group met at the Holiday Inn on Fairway Lane in Verona.

Bernie Gardner of Columbia Gas of Virginia, the Committee Chairperson, welcomed everyone and shared the meeting's agenda.

Steve Light of VUPS provided an update on the following:

- The meeting day was 8-11, and Common Ground Alliance was hoping to have volunteers “work the ropes” at NBC’s Today Show and CBS’s Early Show that morning in an effort to educate folks on calling 811 before digging.
- Technology for electronic white lining, proven successful in Phase I of the Virginia Pilot, is being used by more and more folks. Chris Queen of Williams Gas Pipeline, present at the meeting, is working to provide free phones with free data plans for one year for excavators working in the areas where the WGP pipeline exists.
- Training continues for Phase II, applying GPS technology to the locator’s side. A fifth class was held in July at VUPS in Roanoke. Nearly 50 individuals have been trained to use the technology. Several organizations are actively using the Phase II equipment and submitting data.
- Web Ticket Management System (TMS) will be offered at no cost to member utilities in the near future. This is a ticket receiving/management system that can be used to run custom reports, assign tickets to locators by area, and many other functions.
- Staking University locator training will be offered again in 2009. Classes will be held in Williamsburg, Glen Allen, Roanoke and Lorton. Contact VUPS for more information.
- See the Events page at [www.missutilityofvirginia.com](http://www.missutilityofvirginia.com) for directions to the upcoming meetings:
  - 8/18 – Lynchburg Area DPC
  - 9/1 – Advisory Committee Meeting (Daleville)
  - 9/8 – Fredericksburg Area DPC
  - 9/15 – Winchester Area DPC
  - 9/23 – VUPS Quarterly Membership Meeting (Mariners Landing)
  - 9/29 – 10/1 – SCC Pipeline Safety Conference (Virginia Beach)

Phil Garber with the City of Charlottesville shared a presentation on the Public Awareness program the City’s Gas Division has developed. Flicker the Flame, the City’s Gas Safety Ambassador, was created to assist with spreading the word about natural gas and safety issues. Phil said that the City had five objectives with the campaign:



- To educate both our customers and non-customers who live or work near our pipelines how to recognize the odor of natural gas and how to respond if they detect possible gas odors. Early recognition of a gas odor and proper response can save lives.
- To raise the awareness of the affected public and key stakeholders of the presence of buried natural gas pipelines in the communities we serve. A more informed public will also understand that they have a significant role in helping to prevent third-party damage accidents.
- To help excavators understand the steps that they can take to prevent third party damage and respond properly if they cause damage to our pipelines.
- To help emergency response agencies that may assist Charlottesville Public Utilities-Gas in an emergency understand the proper actions to take in response to a gas release or emergency.
- To educate the public on the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and the appropriate treatment should CO poisoning be suspected.

A pre-campaign survey was conducted to gain baseline information, “you have to know where you are starting from before you can see if you’ve made progress.” Phil praised the folks who “stepped up” and have made Flicker the Flame a success: Irene Peterson, in creating Flicker and the marketing; Mary Zylowski, who wears the Flicker costume at schools, and D.J. Manafi, the Flicker program coordinator.

A video was shared chronicling Flicker the Flame’s creation and subsequent public awareness activities.

See Flicker the Flame on the web at <http://www.charlottesville.org/index.aspx?page=2356>

At the end of his presentation, Phil added that the City of Charlottesville is participating in the Phase II pilot testing. He said that their locator experienced a bit of a learning curve, but the more he uses the equipment, the better and faster he gets.

In the open forum time, one question was raised by a locator of a more rural utility. Excavators tend to call them directly for locating instead of calling in a ticket. The locator wanted to know if he is liable if he marks the utility for his customer. It was suggested that he contact Frank Hudik of the State Corporation Commission for an answer to that question.

The group’s final meeting of 2009 will occur on Tuesday, November 10, at the Holiday Inn.

