



Backgrounder

The Facts About Hit Lines

- Last year, ATCO Gas responded to over 900 hit line calls. Over 40 per cent of those incidents were the result of no request for line locates before digging. Many of these occur on private property. Homeowners commonly say they were planting trees, digging fence post holes, anchoring supports for a deck or removing tree roots when they hit the gas line.
- The biggest myth about underground gas lines is that they are located deep below the ground surface. This is not true. Gas lines are initially installed about one meter deep, but as structures are built and topsoil is moved, lines can be much closer to the surface.
- The #1 reason why a residential customer hits an underground line is because the customer, or the customer's contractor, did not have the lines located by calling Alberta One-Call before the project began. This is a free service.
- The #1 reason why a commercial customer or contractor hits an underground gas line is the gas line was not exposed properly, for example, using hand excavation.
- ATCO Gas should be contacted if a line has been damaged, no matter how minor. Repairs should be completed by ATCO Gas personnel.
- When a natural gas line is hit and punctured there will be a hissing sound (depending on the pressure in the line) and a strong odor of sulfur which is like rotten eggs.
- In a wide-open area, because natural gas is lighter than air, the natural gas escapes up into the atmosphere, reducing potential danger of explosion or fire. In an enclosed area, there is great concern for safety and immediate evacuation of the area may be required.
- Customers can be without gas service for anywhere from an hour to one or more days, depending on where the hit line is located and the extent of the damage.

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- Hit gas lines can result in serious injuries or fatalities and major property damage. Repairs can also be very expensive. To be fair to our customers who do dig responsibly, ATCO Gas collects the cost to repair the hit line and restore service from the individual or company causing the damage. It may be as little as a few hundred or as much as thousands of dollars.
- The cost includes ATCO Gas' time and resources to respond, repair the line and restore service to affected customers, the cost of the escaping natural gas as well as any fire department response costs.
- To repair hit lines and restore service in a residential area, generally ATCO Gas will:
 - Make the area safe. This includes evacuation of nearby homes or buildings and, if necessary, shutting down the electrical power to the area.
 - Dig down to the line.
 - Squeeze off the line upstream of the break to stop the flow of natural gas.
 - Make the repair to the line.
 - Gain access to each home or building to re-light the furnace and natural gas appliance pilot lights.
- ATCO Gas investigates every hit line. In addition, depending on the nature of the hit line, the local fire department will also be involved.
- To ensure safety, all gas lines must be hand exposed before commencing any digging activity with equipment within a buffer zone located one metre on either side of locate marks. Note that even a tree spade is considered digging equipment.
- Current provincial regulations prohibit constructing buildings over gas lines. This includes additions, eaves, garages or enclosed patios. Small, portable, freestanding garden sheds are acceptable, provided no permanent foundation is installed.
- Do not plant trees on top of gas lines. Typically, the root bulb of a tree should remain outside the buffer zone to avoid conflict with the buried gas line. Some tree varieties will require additional clearance while some shrubs are exempt from these requirements. Contact your local ATCO Gas office before planting trees if you are unsure of space limitations.
- If you cause natural gas to escape, provincial legislation requires you to notify Alberta Environment at 1-800-222-6514.