

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF NORTH DAKOTA

Public Service Commission
Cahoon Enterprises LLC
Damage Prevention Enforcement

Case No. PU-15-406

Public Service Commission,)
Complainant,)
vs.)
Cahoon Enterprises LLC,)
Respondent.)

Complaint

The Public Service Commission of North Dakota, by and through Advocacy Staff (Staff), for its complaint against Cahoon Enterprises LLC, alleges and shows the following:

I

Cahoon Enterprises LLC (Cahoon) is a foreign corporation authorized to do business in North Dakota. Its registered agent with the North Dakota Secretary of State is Mark Cahoon PO BOX 127, Ray, ND 58849-0127.

II

Hess Corporation (Hess) is a foreign corporation authorized to do business in North Dakota.

III

North Dakota Century Code section 49-23-04(1) provides:

Except in an emergency, an excavator shall contact the notification center and provide an excavation or location notice at least forty-eight hours before beginning any excavation, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, unless otherwise agreed to between the excavator and operator.

If an operator determines more time is necessary for location, the operator may request a twenty-four-hour extension of the excavation or location notice by notifying the notification center. The notification center shall notify the excavator of the extension. An excavation begins the first time excavation occurs in an area that was not previously identified by the excavator in an excavation notice.

North Dakota Century Code section 28-32-22 provides:

Unless otherwise prohibited by specific statute or rule, informal disposition may be made of any adjudicative proceeding, or any part or issue thereof, by stipulation, settlement, waiver of hearing, consent order, default, alternative dispute resolution, or other informal disposition, subject to agency approval. Any administrative agency may adopt rules of practice or procedure for informal disposition if such rules do not substantially prejudice the rights of any party. Such rules may establish procedures for converting an administrative matter from one type of proceeding to another type of proceeding.

North Dakota Century Code section 49-07-01.1 provides:

Any person who violates any statute, commission order, or commission rule which applies to matters within the authority of the commission under chapters 8-08, 8-09, 8-10, 24-09, 32-25, and 51-05.1, titles 60 and 64, and title 49 except for chapters 49-22 and 49-23, shall, in addition to any other penalty provided, be subject to a civil penalty of not to exceed five thousand dollars. A violation occurring under chapter 49-23, in addition to any other penalty, is subject to a civil penalty not to exceed twenty-five thousand dollars. The commission shall develop policies for the assessment of penalties under chapter 49-23 which will take into consideration the severity of damages and the conduct of the offender. The civil penalty may be compromised by the commission. The amount of the penalty when finally determined or agreed upon in compromise, if not paid, may be recovered in a civil action in the courts of this state.

North Dakota Administrative Code section 69-02-04-05 provides:

In any proceeding in which the commission is authorized to act after opportunity for hearing, opportunity is afforded by service of notice fixing a reasonable period of time within which any person desiring to be heard may file a protest or request for a hearing. If a protest or request for hearing is not filed within the time provided, the commission may dispose of the matter on the basis of the pleadings, other submittals, and the studies and recommendations of the staff. A party not requesting oral hearing in the party's pleading is deemed to have waived a hearing for the

purpose of the decision, but not for the purpose of applying for rehearing with respect to the decision. If a person requests a hearing but does not show good cause, the commission may determine the matter without a hearing.

IV

On June 24, 2015, the Commission received a ND One-Call Complaint from Charles Columbus with Hess. The complaint alleges a violation by Cahoon of North Dakota Century Code section 49-23 of the One-Call Excavation Notice System by placing a false emergency ticket.

V

On June 26, 2015, Commission staff issued a letter informing Cahoon of Hess's complaint filing, and requested a response by July 13, 2015. Cahoon's July 7, 2015 response asserted that they did not intend to violate the law and were not aware that an emergency ticket could not be placed for their situation.

VI

As alleged by Hess's complaint, on June 24, 2015, Cahoon began an excavation as defined in North Dakota Century Code section 49-23-01(7) while performing pipeline hydro-excavation at Township 156N, Range 95W, Sections 31, 32, 33 and 34, in Williams County, North Dakota. No damage was caused by this excavation.

VII

Based on its investigation Staff determined that Cahoon personnel provided an emergency excavation notice to the North Dakota One Call Notification Center (NDOC) on June 23, 2015 at 12:29pm, with work to begin in the area cited in the complaint to

begin on June 23, 2015 at 12:30pm. The NDOC assigned locate ticket number 15095000 to the excavation notice, which indicates the work was being performed as emergency hydro excavating pipelines. On June 24, 2015, Cahoon personnel began an excavation to hydro excavate pipelines. This excavation occurred only 24 hours after placing the excavation notice.

Based on its investigation, Staff concluded that there was no agreement between Cahoon and Hess under North Dakota Century Code section 49-23-04(1) prior to excavation that would relieve Cahoon of its obligation to provide excavation notice at least forty-eight hours before the excavation.

Based on its investigation, Staff concluded that the excavation was not being made in a time of emergency under North Dakota Century Code section 49-23-04(4), allowing the excavator to give notification after the start of the excavation.

VIII

Cahoon violated North Dakota Century Code section 49-23-04(1) by failing to provide an excavation notice to the NDOC Notification Center at least forty-eight hours before beginning its excavation.

IX

The North Dakota Public Service Commission Damage Prevention Plan provides:

D PROPOSED CIVIL PENALTIES:

1. The following criteria must be used by Commission staff to determine if a civil penalty should be proposed when filing a formal complaint:

- a. The nature, circumstances and severity of the complaint;
- b. The degree of suspected fault on the part of the respondent;
- c. The respondent's history of prior violations or complaints;
- d. The respondent's ability to pay;
- e. Any good faith effort by the respondent in attempting to achieve compliance; and
- f. The effect the penalty may have on the respondent's ability to continue in business.

X

The Respondent must serve an answer to this complaint upon the Complainant and the Commission within twenty days after service of the complaint, or the Commission may deem the complaint to be admitted. Answers must be served in the manner allowed for service under the North Dakota Rules of Civil Procedure.

Prayer for Relief

Based on the foregoing, Staff seeks the following relief:

1. That the Commission find Cahoon in violation of North Dakota Century Code ch.49-23 for failing to comply with the One Call requirements enumerated in North Dakota Century Code section 49-23-04(1).
2. That the Commission impose an appropriate civil penalty up to \$25,000, but at least \$500.
3. Such other relief that the Commission finds just and proper.

Dated this 4th day of April, 2016



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