

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF NORTH DAKOTA

Public Service Commission  
KPH, Inc.  
Damage Prevention Enforcement

Case No. PU-18-412

Public Service Commission,	)	
Complainant,	)	
vs.	)	
KPH, Inc.	)	Complaint
Respondent.	)	

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

I

KPH, Inc. (KPH) is a North Dakota corporation with principal offices located at, 9530 39<sup>th</sup> St S, Fargo, ND 58104-7824. KPH is subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission and is an “excavator” as defined by North Dakota Century Code (N.D.C.C.) § 49-23-01(8).

II

The Commission has been granted jurisdiction pursuant to N.D.C.C. chapter 49-23 and N.D.C.C. § 49-07-01.1. N.D.C.C. § 49-07-1.1 provides that “[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.”

### III

N.D.C.C. 49-23-05 provides:

“To avoid damage to and minimize interference with underground facilities in and near the excavation area, a ticket holder shall:

1. Maintain a clearance between an underground facility and the cutting edge or point of any mechanized equipment, considering the known limit of control of the cutting edge or point to avoid damage to the facility.
2. Provide support in a manner approved by the operator for underground facilities in and near the construction area, including backfill operations to protect the facilities. Backfill must be of a material equal to or better in both quality and quantity to the existing backfill.
3. Assume ownership of materials used to mark the facility, use reasonable efforts to maintain markings during excavation, and remove all tangible marking materials used to mark the underground facility and site area upon completion of the excavation.
4. Assume the cost of excavation to expose the facility unless otherwise indicated by owner of facility.
5. Conduct the excavation in a careful and prudent manner.
6. Properly manage spoil material to prevent shifting or falling material that could damage below ground facilities.”

### IV

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.

### V

On December 4, 2018, the Commission received a ND One-Call Complaint from Lisa Kallberg with Xcel Energy (Xcel). The complaint alleges a violation by KPH of N.D.C.C. 49-23-05(5) of the One-Call Excavation Notice System by failing to conduct the excavation in a careful and prudent manner.

## VI

On June 12, 2018, KPH personnel began an excavation to install a new sanitary sewer at the intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> St S and 13<sup>th</sup> Ave S in Fargo, ND under ND-One Call ticket 18042411. As a result of this excavation Xcel's 5/8" natural gas service line was damaged resulting in a repair cost of approximately \$893.

## VII

On January 2, 2019, Commission staff issued a letter informing KPH of Xcel's complaint filing, and requested a response by January 17, 2019. KPH's January 17, 2019 response asserted that the gas line was tangled in the root ball of a tree and removing the tree roots caused the damage.

## VIII

KPH violated N.D.C.C. 49-23-05(5) by failing to conduct the excavation in a careful and prudent manner.

## IX

The 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.

### Relief Requested

Based on the foregoing, Staff seeks the following relief:

1. That the Commission find KPH violated N.D.C.C. chapter 49-23 with the One Call requirements enumerated in N.D.C.C. 49-23-05(5).
2. That the Commission impose an appropriate civil penalty up to \$25,000, but at least \$1000.
3. Such other relief that the Commission finds just and proper.

Dated this 18<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2019



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