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John B. Howard, Interim Chair

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**APRIL IS "SAFE DIGGING MONTH"
— Excavators, Contractors and Homeowners: Call 811 Before Digging —**

ALBANY —The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today announced that it is participating in the nationwide effort to recognize April 2021, as “Safe Digging Month.” Highlighting the importance of safe digging helps to remind excavators and contractors that State law requires them to call one of the State’s toll-free One-Call Centers before starting any excavation or digging project. In recognition of this, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo has proclaimed April 2021 as “Safe Digging Month” in New York.

“April is the beginning of the construction digging season,” **said Chair John B. Howard.** “Damage to underground utility facilities during excavation can result in loss of utility service, personal injury and property damage, so we are urging everyone who is going to be excavating to do their part in protecting crucial underground infrastructure by simply dialing 811 before digging.”

The keys to preventing damage to underground facilities are the two “one-call notification systems” that serve as communication links between contractors/excavators and the operators of underground facilities (local utilities/municipalities). New York 811 is the one-call notification system serving New York City and Long Island, and Dig Safely New York is the other, serving the remainder of the State. When calling from inside the areas served, either can be reached by simply dialing 811. In addition, both One-Call Centers allow local requests to be submitted at any time through web-based ticket entry. Use of the One-Call Centers is free.

In recognition of safe digging practices, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed into General Business Law, requirements that excavators be trained prior to excavating. These requirements went into effect on May 4, 2019.

The Commission, which oversees electric and telecommunication utilities, as well as nearly 100,000 miles of natural gas and hazardous liquid pipelines transporting much needed energy across the State to consumers, prides itself on its zealous safety oversight. The Commission’s rigorous review of utilities’ natural gas and hazardous liquid infrastructure and operations exceeds federal requirements, and includes prescribing aggressive safety performance metrics, holding utilities financially accountable to meet standards, and conducting thousands of incident investigations. The Commission’s team of highly trained employees closely monitors utility activity daily to ensure compliance.

Along with participating in the nationwide Safe Digging Month program, the Commission’s staff works diligently to enforce its pipeline safety regulations, which are among the most stringent in the nation, to

ensure that utility companies adhered to them regarding the safe operation of the utility's natural gas and hazardous liquid pipeline systems. To continue to improve pipeline safety, the Commission routinely monitors the utilities' damage prevention programs to make sure that they are up to date, to identify improvement areas, and to ensure that the plans are in compliance with the Commission's pipeline safety requirements. Over the past 17 years, these efforts have led to the steady decrease in statewide damages to natural gas facilities per 1,000 notifications; reaching a low of 1.60 damages per 1,000 notifications in 2017, making New York State a national leader for this metric.

New York leads in its use of financial incentives and penalties related to pipeline safety. Excavators who damage underground facilities due to the failure to follow the regulations are not only subject to civil penalties, but also are liable for repair costs. State law exempts excavators from liability for repair costs if the damage is caused by the utility's or municipality's failure to comply with the law, such as failure to participate in the one-call notification systems.

For more information about Dig Safely New York, go to www.digsafelynewyork.com or call 315-437-7394. For more information about New York 811, visit the www.newyork-811.com, for general questions and information, call 631-778-8111, to place a mark out request, call 1-800-272-4480.