

## **Damage Prevention Council of Texas**

Accidents happen when risks aren't managed during the process of requesting utility locates prior to excavation and then safely working around underground facilities after locate markings are placed. Employee safety, inefficiency, chronic delays and even temporary down time can significantly affect an Excavators' bottom line. Fortunately, there are opportunities to improve job efficiency and significantly reduce these risks simply by becoming involved with the Damage Prevention Council of Texas.

Regional Chapters meet monthly, or quarterly in some parts of Texas, providing a forum where excavators and utility & pipeline operators share information and perspectives, and then work together to solve issues with the 811 process and underground facility locating on a local level. Regional Chapters also provide educational outreach reaching thousands of industry stakeholders by providing on-site safety meetings and most notably large excavation safety festivals.

### **History**

The Damage Prevention Council of Texas, also known as the DPC, is the result of decades of work by pioneers in the field that had a vision for state-wide coverage and beyond. While there were a number of UCC and LEPC damage prevention sub-committees operating in Houston, Dallas, the RGV, Austin, & El Paso in the early days, it wasn't until 2008 that Texas811, under the direction of Director of Damage Prevention David Wofford, began a centralized campaign to build upon the work of these sub-committees to create a state-wide damage prevention cooperative. Texas811 Damage Prevention Managers JimBob Sims, Jaime Medina, John Sparks, and myself set to work developing regional DPCs in previously unrepresented areas of the State with the intent that any stakeholder drive no more than 2 hours to attend a DPC meeting. As a result of our efforts, the Texas811 DPCs expanded into 23 independent regional entities geographically aligned with the TxDOT districts representing all 254 counties of Texas.

Prior to 2014, all outreach and operating expenses of the 23 regional entities were wholly funded by Texas811 but it was becoming apparent that with projected growth, the DPCs would need to become incorporated into a completely independent and self-funded entity. In early 2014, Texas811 filed to establish a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation which would officially be known as Damage Prevention Council of Texas. Incorporation as an independent non-profit entity would allow fundraising activities enabling DPC of Texas to dramatically increase its outreach capabilities. The first such example of the fundraising potential came later that year with the inaugural Eagle Ford Safety & Equipment Rodeo Roundup which garnered 47 sponsors and exhibitors funding the major safety festival which attracted approximately 850 attendees from all across South Texas and provided an excess of approximately \$8000 above the cost of the event. Funding from the Eagle Ford Rodeo allowed the fledgling DPC of Texas to assume complete responsibility for operating expenses and grow the 23 regional Chapters to meet our mission *"to facilitate underground utility & pipeline damage prevention, promote Common Ground Alliance Best Practices, and contribute toward public safety and environmental protection through stakeholder education and communication."*

### **Today**

Governed by an 11 member Board of Directors and led by President John Sparks, the DPC of Texas has grown into one of the largest damage prevention organizations in the United States,

second only to the Common Ground Alliance. We are 100% volunteer-driven and every Chapter has its' own Bylaws and Officers that work to meet the mission of the parent organization and providing grass-roots damage prevention outreach on the local level. For example, during National Safe Digging Month, regional Chapters embark on an "any town" Safe Digging Month campaign working with local government on Mayoral proclamations which are then taken directly into citizens' living rooms via local media. While regional Chapters may represent a vast area of 10 – 14 counties and operate out of a hub city, the most effective ones occasionally move their Chapter meetings around the territory to small towns and incorporating large scale safety meetings drawing in surrounding municipals.

In some cases, local and regional outreach has created opportunities and prompted DPC of Texas to work beyond state lines, and even national borders. For example, DPC of Texas identified the need for expanded outreach in some cases where Excavators coming into Texas to work were presenting challenges to local utility operators. In other cases, Midstream operators whose pipelines traversed the Permian Basin from the Texas Gulf Coast into New Mexico requested additional outreach, providing opportunities for us to work closely with New Mexico 811. And thus, our "No Borders" outreach initiative was born, extending the reach of DPC of Texas into New Mexico and the Mexican State of Chihuahua. Originating in the El Paso region, the Paso del Norte Chapter recognized the need to coordinate with adjacent cities as a significant number of excavators working in El Paso come from Las Cruces, New Mexico and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. The local Chapter works to bring Excavators & Operators from these cities into El Paso County where our quarterly meetings typically draw between 60 – 100 attendees. And while "Call Before You Dig" is not a common practice in Mexico, we are able to impart safe excavation best practices to our member counterparts Gas Natural de Juárez & other Juarez municipal utilities that they apply in their own city of 1.3 million citizens. In 2018, the annual Paso del Norte Excavation Safety Day drew 800 attendees which holds the current title as the largest excavation safety festival among the 23 Chapters and to our knowledge, the only bi-national event of this type in the world. The Permian Basin and South Plains Chapters recognized the need for additional outreach in Southeastern New Mexico to help protect the large transmission pipelines that cross into that region so they partnered New Mexico 811 to create Southeastern New Mexico DPC based in the Hobbs/Carlsbad region. This recently formed DPC now serves as a sister organization to the Permian Basin and South Plains Chapters and typically draws over a 100 attendees to their bi-monthly meetings.

In closing, if you are reading this article you are the type of person that should be involved in regional Chapter meetings. For every "problem" with 811 and underground facility protection there is a solution so become a part of that solution and get involved. Dates & locations of regional Chapter meetings can be found at: [www.dpcoftexas.org](http://www.dpcoftexas.org). To see photos and videos of our damage prevention outreach efforts, follow us on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/dpctexas/](https://www.facebook.com/dpctexas/).

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