

LINE ALERT

Invention sparks glowing testimonials

By **MATTHEW BARTON**
Leader-Post

Hitting a gas line or a powerline can be a fatal mistake.

A single spark can turn a ruptured gas line into an inferno, creating Hell on Earth.

Arcola's Keith Barry has invented a way to protect workers and make sure Hell doesn't arrive any time soon. He calls it Line Alert.

Barry used to work as an excavator, working as a backhoe operator in Alberta and Saskatchewan. He said hitting a line can be a traumatic experience.

"We were excavating along a rail line in Colon-say, east of Saskatoon, and there were not supposed to be any gas lines in the area and we hit one," Barry recalled of a dangerous incident in which he was involved.

The pressure of the gas blew open the side of the ditch. Barry had to slam on the backhoe's emergency shutoff button to prevent the engine from exploding.

"It scares the hell out of you," said Barry.

Line Alert is designed as a marker for excavators digging up lines. It provides accurate measurements and prevents a spotter from having to constantly climb into the ditch to identify the line.

"It keeps them safe and it saves them time," said Barry.

Locating lines is part of everyday construction in Saskatchewan.

Currently, electronic locators will mark where the line is buried with flags, and then the line is "daylight-ed," or exposed to confirm its location. Finally, an excavator will come and dig around the line.

As the layers of soil are removed, a

worker must spot for the backhoe operator, climbing into the ditch and making sure the line hasn't been hit.

Climbing into the ditch is dangerous, according to Barry. There are oil, gas and electrical lines buried underground, all posing a threat.

It can also waste a lot of time.

Lines are often exposed for repairs, replacement or installation of new lines.

Companies prefer installing underground because it's safer for the public, the lines are protected from the weather, and lines are difficult to vandalize.

Line Alert is a destructible, multicoloured panel that is inserted into the ground along the digging site.

Barry said he modelled it after the venetian blinds in his windows.

As the operator digs, the panel is destroyed, revealing the layers of colour to indicate depth. Green means it is safe to dig, while red means the

line is close by and the work must be completed by hand.

He thinks there is a good market for his invention and it's a worthy investment. He launched the product in December and began touring trade shows across Canada and the United States.

"More and more utilities are going underground. It's getting crowded down there," said Barry.

Testimonials from clients have been glowing.

"We did a dig with it recently and our operator was so happy because he could see exactly where he was," said Jerry Swayze, the owner of Swayze Construction in Carnduff.

Barry said his invention is real and practical, and easy to use. "I've been there, so I know operators will use it."

QUOTABLE

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