



Construction professionals and utility company leaders gather for 2022 New York 811 excavation safety expo

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(L to R) Roger Sampson and Jeff Skiles

Bohemia, NY Over 300 construction professionals and leaders from utility companies, including Verizon, PSEG, ConEd and National Grid, attended New York 811's Excavation Safety Expo at the TWA Hotel at JFK Airport, which focused on safety and awareness. The annual event provided sessions relating to best practices for safe excavation and construction. Also featured was VR technology which is used as an educational tool to assist those in the excavation sector enhance their safety awareness.

The mission of this event is to give companies and organizations that are involved in digging and excavation the tools and information they need to reduce or eliminate accidents or disruption of critical services.

After two years off due to the pandemic, the expo returned. The event included demonstrations of New York 811's VR-X-SIM virtual reality excavation simulator, an expo hall, educational programs and an awards dinner.

Awards were presented to several individuals who have played important roles in enhancing safety and supporting New York 811's mission. The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Michael Murtha and the Damage Prevention Partner award was presented to ConEd.

Keynote speaker and aviator Jeff Skiles, best known as the co-pilot of the famous "Miracle on the Hudson" landing which saved the lives of 155 passengers and crew members, shared his inspiring story with attendees. He emphasized the importance of safety, training, having procedures and teamwork.

"At New York 811 our goal and legal responsibility is to act as the critical communications hub that ensures excavation projects are done safely from Manhattan to Montauk. Our programs and speakers discussed safe practices and reinforced the importance of 'knowing what's below' before any digging occurs. Our team, along with exhibitors and sponsors, presented educational programs

as well as shared the latest technologies that make job sites safer and reduce incidents from occurring. Our keynote speaker, Jeff Skiles, delivered an inspiring message to our attendees,” said Roger Sampson, executive director of New York 811.

The event was sponsored by PSEG Long Island, Verizon and supported by partners including ConEdison, Buckeye Partners, National Grid, Utto, Hallen, OCC Locating Services, One Call Concepts, RECONN, USIC and Asplundh Construction.

Each year across New York City and Long Island, tens of thousands of construction projects and repairs require digging and excavation. The potential for minor as well as severe life-threatening incidents around sites is real. New York 811 is the legally designated not-for-profit that acts as the communications link between utility companies, contractors, individuals, private excavation companies and others that are planning any digging activities in the five boroughs of New York City and Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island. The organization works to ensure that all locations where mechanical digging or excavation will take place are properly marked and safe.

All utilities and contractors must abide by state law and call 811 before starting an excavation project, whether it is large or small. New York 811 shares this information with utility companies and designated companies who then mark the ground with paint and/or flags to identify underground utility lines.

“At this event we demonstrated our new VR-X-SIM mobile virtual reality system which we designed to re-create hundreds of real-life excavation sites and scenarios. This is a one-of-a-kind training tool and a glimpse into the future of construction safety simulations. Awareness and training are critical for keeping everyone safe and preventing damage to utilities, homes and commercial properties. If utility lines are damaged, this could lead to power outages, loss of gas or water service or telecommunications and internet outages that could last days or weeks,” said Sampson.

When digging, striking an underground water, gas, electric, cable or telephone line can cause severe injury or death, disrupt utility services and cost thousands and even millions of dollars to repair. In the United States, the cost to repair these damages has reached \$30 billion each year. Failing to call or notify 811 before digging is at the root of many of these accidents.

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