



# UTILITIES UNDERGROUNDING PROGRAM

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)



*The City of San Diego, through its Utilities Undergrounding Program (the Program), is currently relocating approximately 30–35 miles of overhead utility lines underground throughout the city each year. This Program takes properties off of the existing overhead utility system and connects those properties to a new safer and more reliable underground system. Once the utilities are undergrounded, utility wires and poles are removed, enhancing views and community character.*

### CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

#### **How will your utilities be undergrounded during construction?**

There are four main phases of construction:

1. **Trenching** involves the Program contractor digging in the streets and in each individual property to place plastic tubes known as conduits that will eventually house the newly underground lines. **Paneling** requires the program contractor to prepare each electric meter panel to accept the new underground service. Prior to these phases, all existing street trees will be inspected and trimmed if necessary in order to protect them from construction equipment damage.
2. **Cabling** involves running utility lines through the newly placed underground conduits. Once cabling is complete, the new underground system will be **energized** for use.
3. **Cutover** involves taking residents off of the old overhead system and converting them to the new underground system.
4. **Removal** involves taking down the overhead lines and utility poles. Removal occurs when all customers are cutover onto the new underground system. Once all of the utility companies' lines are removed from the aboveground utility poles, the poles are then removed. This portion of work happens at the end of construction. Trees impacted by overhead line removal may be removed and replaced at the discretion of the Program Arborist with input from the property owner.

#### **How long does it take to build an undergrounding project?**

A project typically takes approximately 2–3 years to construct.

#### **Am I responsible for work on my private property?**

If a property owner signs the Permit to Enter letter, the Program will perform all activities to underground the utilities. However, if corrections are required because the electric meter panel does not meet minimum code requirements, those corrections are the responsibility of the homeowner.

#### **What happens if a property currently receives its utility services from the rear of the property or an alley?**

When utilities are undergrounded, utility lines will no longer connect to a property from the rear. Instead, utilities will be moved to the street and placed underground to service each property. The Program will trench to the front of your property from the

street. If your electric meter panel is located at the rear of your property, conduit will be placed around your property to connect to the electric meter panel. An electrical conduit is an electrical piping system used for protection and routing of electrical wiring. Conduit placement will be done in the most discreet manner possible.

#### **What happens if something is damaged during construction?**

Prior to the start of construction, we photo document the condition of the project area, and your property, to ensure that we meet this goal. If something on your property is damaged during construction, the responsible contractor or utility company will repair it. Your property will be left in the condition it was prior to construction.

#### **How will construction affect access to my property?**

Construction crews are responsible for maintaining access to your street and property during construction. You can ask the trenching crews to pull a trench plate over the open trench in order to access your property.

#### **Will neighbors share a trench that is on private property?**

No, each property is required to have its own, individual trench.

#### **Will my utility services be disrupted during construction?**

There will be short, planned service outages lasting typically between 15–30 minutes. The contractor or utility company is required to notify you prior to any service outages.



*Example of Trenching with new underground conduit*



**CONTACT  
INFORMATION**

Information Line: (619) 533 3841  
Email: [undergrounding@sandiego.gov](mailto:undergrounding@sandiego.gov)  
Website: [www.sandiego.gov/undergrounding](http://www.sandiego.gov/undergrounding)



### INFRASTRUCTURE

#### **What are the large utility “boxes” you’ve seen in neighborhoods where utilities have been undergrounded?**

Those “boxes” are transformers/pedestals that make power usable in households.

#### **Why are transformers/pedestals placed aboveground instead of underground?**

Transformers/pedestals are placed aboveground due to safety, environmental, financial, reliability, operability and availability reasons. For more information, please visit the Program website SDG&E Fact Sheets at:

<http://www.sandiego.gov/undergrounding/faq/index.shtml>.



SDG&E crew member removes overhead lines

#### **How are the locations for the transformer/pedestal chosen?**

Each utility company strategically chooses the location of its transformers/pedestals to meet service requirements and to avoid conflicts with other existing facilities such as water and sewer lines.

#### **Are transformers/pedestals placed on private property?**

Where accessibility allows, transformers will be placed in the City of San Diego’s Right-of-Way.

### COST

#### **What are the costs to underground your utilities?**

Your utilities will be undergrounded at **no cost** to you when you sign the Permit to Enter letter. However, if your electric meter panel does not meet minimum code requirements, then you will need to correct the infraction at your own expense.

#### **How are these projects funded?**

Utility ratepayers fund “surcharge” or “residential block” projects through small surcharges in their monthly bills. SDG&E solely funds “20A” projects specifically designated for thoroughfare roads. Funding does not come from the City’s General Fund, which is the primary operating fund that pays for services such as police, fire, parks and recreation.

### NOTIFICATIONS

#### **What types of notifications may you receive?**

1. **Permit to Enter Letter:** This notice is required to be signed by the property owner so that construction work on your property can begin. When signed, the Program will conduct all activities to underground your property’s utilities to the new underground system. Work inside your home will not be required. Property owners who do not want to sign the Permit to Enter agreement will be legally responsible to perform all necessary work to ensure continuity of service when the overhead lines are removed.
2. **Tree Letter:** This notice details the Program’s tree-planting effort as a further enhancement and restoration of your neighborhood. Signing this form is encouraged but it is not required to underground your utilities. A separate notice will be sent to property owners that may be affected by post-construction tree removals.
3. **“Correction Notice”:** This notice is a form issued by a City of San Diego Combination Inspector who is assigned to your project area. A “Correction Notice” is issued for an electric meter panel that does not meet minimum code requirements and identifies steps to correct it. The City cannot pay for repairs to pass inspection and it cannot recommend contractors for this work.
4. **Door Hanger Notice:** This notice is left approximately 1–2 weeks prior to the start of trenching activities and provides contact information for the trenching contractor and the Program Information Line. Since door hanger notices are not mailed, it’s important that you check your door regularly for these notices.
5. **E-newsletter:** This series will begin once construction starts and will be distributed on a monthly basis or when significant construction activities occur. You can sign up for email updates by emailing: [undergrounding@sandiego.gov](mailto:undergrounding@sandiego.gov) and identifying the project in your neighborhood.



SDG&E crew member prepares an electric meter panel to accept the new underground service