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For IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

18-08

PSC Accepts First in the Nation \$100,000 Federal Grant for Utility Damage Prevention and Safety Enforcement; Governor Signs Proclamation for Dig Safely Month

ATLANTA, May 29, 2008 – The Georgia Public Service Commission (Commission) accepted the first federal grant check for \$100,000 from the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to expand the Commission's efforts in preventing damage to Georgia's underground utilities. This is the first federal grant of its type to any state for damage prevention, education and enforcement efforts since the passage of the federal PIPES Act of 2006. PHMSA Administrator Carl Johnson presented the check to Commissioner Doug Everett who was joined by fellow Commissioners Chuck Eaton and Stan Wise. They were joined by representatives of the Commission, PHMSA, UPC, Georgia Utility Contractors Association, Georgia Power, Atlanta Gas Light, AT&T and other representatives of organizations involved in the prevention of damage to Georgia's underground utility infrastructure.

The grant recognizes the Commission's damage prevention program as a model for other states to follow in reducing damages to underground utilities by educating excavators and utilities in avoiding accidents that can cause expensive and often dangerous damage to buried utilities.

Commissioner Everett said, "We appreciate receiving these funds from PHMSA to assist us in our damage prevention efforts by educating all individuals about calling before they dig. Working collectively toward a common goal to prevent damages and personal injuries from occurring is a continuous program that requires team work. Since the passage of the Georgia Utility Facility Protection Act in 2000, the state has built a damage prevention program second to none in the nation."

Everett added, "For those states who do not currently have a damage prevention program, I would issue a challenge to follow Georgia's lead and begin such a program, it is the right thing to do. I also want to express my appreciation for the hard work of our Facilities Protection Director Danny McGriff in obtaining these grants. Danny's tenacity and perseverance during the application and submission process culminated in our receiving these grant monies."

Commissioner Everett also presented a check from the Commission for \$25,507 to the Utilities Protection Center. The UPC will use the check to expand its DIRT system and will use these funds to further its IT capabilities for management of the monumental amount of data gathered on utility damages in the state. Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue also presented the group a proclamation naming May 2008 as Dig Safely Month in Georgia.

According to Claudette Campbell, executive director of the UPC, Funds from the Commission grant will be used to develop a software program that will combine local programs and interface with the Common Ground Alliance's (CGA) Damage Information Reporting Tool (DIRT). Currently damages to underground utility facilities are required to be reported to the UPC, the facility owner, and the Commission.

“Data from several software programs is needed to determine the effectiveness of our damage prevention program. The current process we use is time consuming as well as labor intensive. This new software will allow the user to enter the information one time and then it will communicate with all the necessary parties and with the DIRT tool. DIRT's primary purpose is collecting underground facility damage data. This data is analyzed to learn why events occur and how actions by stakeholders can prevent them in the future; thereby, ensuring the safety and protection of people and the infrastructure. Data collection will identify root causes, perform trend analysis, and help educate all stakeholders so that damages can be reduced through effective practices and procedures. The more we know about current damages, the more we can prevent in the future.”

Photographs from the event are posted on the Commission web site, www.psc.state.ga.us.

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