



## How Subcontracting in Public Rights-of-Way Impacts First Responders

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As the global race to [5G](#) continues to heat up, first responders should be aware of the safety risks that come with the massive infrastructure deployment required for new, high-capacity networks. Localities across the U.S. are seeing a rapid increase in wireless carriers' deployment of infrastructure to support new networks with ultra-fast speeds and low latency. To deploy the fiber-optic cable that is the backbone of 5G, workers need to dig under sidewalks and roads and coordinate with gas, water, and other utilities.

Unfortunately, many telecom companies are building their wireless networks using a web of out-of-state, subcontracted labor instead of locally-based direct employees. These multi-layered contracting arrangements often result in a wireless carrier contracting out excavation and fiber deployment work to an infrastructure firm that then contracts to additional layers of subcontractors to do the construction work. These arrangements pose clear accountability challenges.

In the worst cases, subcontractors have hit gas lines, causing explosions that require the attention of first responders.

- ▶ In January 2012, a Verizon subcontractor, FGC Communications, in West Haverstraw, New York struck a natural gas main while doing excavation work in preparation to install fiber optic cable conduit. As a result of the explosion, a townhouse was destroyed and four people— two firefighters with the West Haverstraw Fire Department and two Orange and Rockland gas utility employees —were seriously injured.
- ▶ In July 2018, a Verizon subcontractor, VC Tech, in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin hit a gas line causing an explosion that leveled half a city block, and killed firefighter Cory Barr, Captain of the Sun Prairie Volunteer Fire Department.
- ▶ In November 2018, Comcast subcontractors, ICS Communications and Bohrenworks, in Aurora, Colorado struck a gas line while boring underground to lay fiber optic lines causing an explosion at a retirement facility. The explosion killed one person and injured three others, including an Aurora Fire Rescue firefighter.



# New Subcontractor Transparency Requirements Approved for NYC

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On January 15, 2020, the City of New York voted to [approve increased subcontractor transparency requirements](#) for new mobile telecom deployments. The new requirements will help the City better understand the multi-layered contracting arrangements used in 5G deployments and ensure safe conditions for workers and the public. The new transparency requirements mandate that companies submit annually a report describing the safety conditions for workers performing installation, maintenance, and other related work. Additionally, the requirements ensure all companies deploying wireless networks in the public rights-of-way are registered to do business in the state, and are properly licensed.

## Call to Action

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Has utility and telecom work in the public rights-of-way impacted you as a first responder?

Encourage your city to adopt similar subcontractor transparency requirements to protect residents, visitors, workers, and public infrastructure.

## Further Reading

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[Statement by Police Chief Anhalt Concerning the Explosion Investigation Disposition](#)  
*City of Sun Prairie, 12/20/2018*

[Aurora firefighters responded to reported gas leaks at Heather Gardens 4 times in weeks before fatal November explosion](#)  
*Sentinel Colorado, 12/4/18 | By Quincy Snowdon*

[Fishers city leaders stop utility project after contractors hit six gas lines in a month](#)  
*Fox 59, 8/24/17 | By Brian Bondus*

[Injured Firefighters, Utility Workers Recovering from Blast That Destroyed West Haverstraw Home](#)  
*Patch, 1/16/2012 | By William Demarest*

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