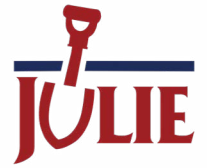


# Service Laterals

## From Invisible to Traceable: Illinois' Locatable Service Laterals Explained



**A new Illinois law requires any existing service lateral that is completely replaced or any newly installed lateral to be made locatable by electromagnetic or other equally effective means for marking the location of the service lateral.**

### How Does the Law Define a Service Lateral?

A service lateral is the section of a service line that connects the mainline facility in the public right-of-way or utility easement to an individual customer or end user—whether that be a residential, commercial or industrial property. While the utility company owns and operates the mainline facility, the property owner is often responsible for the service lateral, which connects the mainline facility to the end user's building or facility beyond the meter point or shut-off valve if one exists.

Take a city sewer system as an example. The municipality owns, operates and maintains the sewer mains and all the manholes connected to the sewer main, whether they are positioned in the middle of the road, right-of-way or utility easement. Some municipalities own the main and the tee connection, some the right-of-way line, and some to the edge of the improved surface; but the laterals that run from that end point to a building wall are predominantly private lines. For properties with city water, as another example, service lines from the water main to the water meter or B-box are usually installed, owned and operated by the city. The lines from the water meter or B-box to the house are installed by a plumbing contractor and privately owned.

Service laterals are most commonly associated with water, wastewater, storm drains, and rural electric co-ops; however, laterals may also deliver gas, electricity and communication services from the utility facility to the end user.

### Why Is It Important Service Laterals Are Locatable?

Historically, little or no documentation has been available regarding the location of private lines and service laterals. And many existing laterals, those made of PVC, polyethylene or rolled black plastic, clay, or Orange-burg pipe cannot be found with electromagnetic pipe and cable locating equipment.

As a result, an excavator today faces an increased risk of inadvertently striking and damaging a service line within the public right-of-way or utility easement. This can slow down operations and add repair costs to a project as well as cause personal injury.

## What Does This Mean for You?

If you’re planning a project that requires you to install or completely replace a service lateral, you are required to make the line locatable. A number of methods are available for doing so.

METHOD	DESCRIPTION	BEST USE
Tracer Wire	Copper or copper-clad steel wire installed alongside non-metallic pipe, allowing an electromagnetic locator to detect its path.	Most common for new installs of gas, water, sewer, and communications lines.
Detectable Warning Tape	Plastic tape with embedded metal strands, placed above the utility; locators can pick up the signal.	Adds both traceability and a dig-in warning during excavation.
Electronic Markers (Ball Markers, RFID Tags)	Passive or active markers buried at key points such as service tees, bends, depth changes. Readable with a specialized locator.	Good for locating specific points, like service connections.
Conductive Pipe or Conduit	Using metallic pipe (steel, copper) that can be directly located without tracer wire.	Common for older systems; less used in modern installations for corrosion reasons.
Sonde (Signal Transmitter)	A small battery-powered transmitter inserted into a pipe or duct; sends a signal picked up by a locator.	Ideal for finding existing, non-traceable laterals during maintenance or mapping.



Service laterals vary greatly between operators, so always confirm local ownership and responsibility rules before starting work.