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Contact:

Media Coordinator
Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure (Aii)
info@aii.org | (703) 574-7376
www.Aii.org

New Report Challenges National Excavation Readiness Narrative

Aii and Virginia 811 release data-driven white paper urging transparency, nuance, and reform in damage prevention metrics and messaging

Washington, D.C. | August 11, 2025 – In a landmark first-time collaboration between the **Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure (Aii)** and a **leading 811 call center, Virginia 811**, a new white paper is taking aim at the national conversation around excavation readiness – and reshaping it with fresh data and uncommon candor. Timed to coincide with National 8/11 Day, this report underscores the importance of awareness and education around *calling before you dig*.

The report, titled “[*Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing*](#),” is authored by **B. Scott Crawford**, President & CEO of Virginia 811. It critically examines the prevailing claim – most recently promoted in the Common Ground Alliance’s (CGA) 2023 DIRT Report – that excavation readiness nationally is effectively a “coin toss.” With a focus on Virginia and applicability to nationwide infrastructure building, this report advances a new model to demonstrate that excavators can have confidence in site readiness before work begins. Equally philosophical and practical, the report invites peer call centers and stakeholders into a dialogue on data and rhetoric.

“When a national metric asserts 50% readiness without clear context, it doesn’t just oversimplify – it risks undermining trust in the 811 system,” said Crawford. “This report offers a grounded and transparent examination of excavation readiness to encourage a constructive path forward.”

Why This Report Matters Now

- **Record Excavation Activity:** Spurred by the COVID-19 recovery and federal infrastructure investments (e.g., the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law), Virginia has seen three record years of locate requests between 2020 and 2024.
- **Rising System Strain:** Virginia’s 811 system has experienced a sharp rise in “no-shows” and excavation delays, particularly in rural broadband expansion areas – pressures mirrored in many states nationwide.
- **Flawed National Conclusions:** The CGA’s national readiness estimate was based on only 12 states – just 24% of the country – and did not sufficiently account for local law, regional conditions, or operational complexity.

“With so much riding on excavation readiness, we need more than soundbites – we need clarity and credibility,” said Benjamin Dierker, Executive Director of Aii. “This paper encourages a more thoughtful approach to the data, helping stakeholders engage with greater transparency and shared purpose.”

Key Findings

- **Virginia is *not* a coin toss:** Using a new, statistically robust model developed by Virginia 811, excavation readiness in the Commonwealth has averaged over **82%** – far exceeding the 50% national narrative.
- **Fiber work is a major pressure point:** Increased rural broadband excavation correlates with higher no-show rates, revealing geographic and sectoral strain points.
- **Over-notification is not the villain:** Contrary to national assumptions, the report finds little statistical evidence in Virginia that update tickets are a primary cause of excavation delays.

A Call to the Industry

The paper ends not with declarations, but with invitations:

- **Hold a national panel:** Aii proposes a CGA–Virginia 811–Georgia 811 roundtable to share methodologies and foster collaboration, which Aii is happy to facilitate.
- **Refrain from using “coin toss” rhetoric:** Stakeholders are urged to adopt more constructive, data-transparent language in public messaging.
- **Empower local analysis:** All 811 centers should develop excavation readiness models tailored to their legal, demographic, and operational realities.

Download the Report

Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing: *Moving Excavation Readiness Beyond Rhetoric and Toward Truth Through a Call for Dialectic*
<https://www.aii.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Sound-and-Fury-Signifying-Nothing.pdf>

Press inquiries and interview requests with the author or Aii leadership can be directed to Benjamin Dierker at bdierker@aii.org or to info@aii.org.

About the Collaboration

This partnership brings together Virginia 811’s operational expertise with the Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure’s nationally recognized role as a trusted voice in infrastructure research. Founded by the first Acting Administrator of PHMSA and bolstered by additional former PHMSA leadership, Aii has maintained a longstanding focus on infrastructure safety, with more than a quarter of its research library dedicated to damage prevention. Together, the two organizations are driving a national conversation grounded in transparency, data integrity, and continuous improvement.

About Aii

The Alliance for Innovation and Infrastructure (Aii) is an independent, national research and educational organization working to advance innovation across industry and public policy. The only nationwide public policy think tank dedicated to infrastructure, Aii explores the intersection of economics, law, and public policy in the areas of climate, damage prevention, eminent domain, energy, infrastructure, innovation, technology, and transportation. Aii.org.

About Virginia 811

Virginia 811 is the Commonwealth's nonprofit one-call notification center, serving as a vital communication link between excavators and underground utility operators. Dedicated to protecting public safety and critical infrastructure, Virginia 811 processes hundreds of thousands of locate requests annually, helping prevent utility damage and reduce excavation-related risks across the state. VA811.com.