Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."
Henry Ford

Who would have thought that Mr. Ford was talking about a construction project? With many construction projects throughout the valley you encounter utility conflicts. However, in this case of the project to the left, what you *don't* want is the conduit to run through the storm drain. What would have been the most appropriate solution? Relocate the conduit or redesign the storm drain?

The goal of a well planned, designed and constructed project is to design and construct a project that meets the needs of the project owner and accommodates utilities in a sensible, cost-effective way. The problem pictured here could have been resolved through a successful **utility coordination process**.

There's no doubt about it – public and private utilities share the use of public rights-of-way and easements. When construction projects are designed and utility conflicts are discovered, the conflicts must be resolved. If they're not, they could lead to costly disruptions in service or delays.

In many cases, the agency assumes the easiest answer is to relocate the utility. However, that may not be the most cost-effective solution. What's needed? Cooperation among all parties and a thorough analysis of each conflict to determine the most appropriate solution.

Through the use of a utility coordination process the agency, designer and utility companies are brought together. The utility coordination process is key to the design and construction phases of a project. Relationships are encouraged, negotiations are undertaken, consensus building is required, and everyone's needs must be taken into consideration, especially those of the taxpayer and the utility customer.

An integral part of the utility coordination process is obtaining the most accurate utility information as early in the design phase as possible, so that appropriate decisions regarding redesigns or relocations can be made. From the project owner's or designer's

standpoint, the most practical solution to the conflict is to relocate the utility. Relocations are often costly, and in some cases can cause project delays.

The first solution to the relocation vs. redesign issue is to begin the utility coordination process between the designer and the affected utilities much *earlier* in the design process. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) refers to this as the *three Cs* –

- Coordination (early and frequent)
- Cooperation
- Communication for more timely and efficient relocation or redesign activities

In fact, the earlier the project owner involves the utility companies in the process, the greater the amount of cooperation, communication and coordination can be expected.

When a design accommodation or redesign is not possible, then through the utility coordination process, incorporating the three C's, can work with the project owner and the utility to ensure the utility relocation is agreed to and implemented as easily and cost effectively as possible.

The **Arizona Utility Coordinating Committee (AUCC)** promotes the *three C*s between project owners and utility companies for facilities located within the rights-of-way and easements, both public and private, in Arizona.

The AUCC was formed in 1985 and is a sub-committee of the American Public Works Association, Arizona Chapter. The AUCC meets on a bi-monthly basis and members of this sub-committee include knowledgeable representatives from a variety of utility companies such as telephone, power, gas, telecommunications, cable TV, water, and wastewater as well as employees of government agencies, contracting companies, and Arizona Bluestake.

The mission of the AUCC is to provide a forum for utilities, governmental agencies, consultants and contractors within the state of Arizona to work together and discuss situations which impact planning, engineering, construction, and new technologies among the member organizations. The AUCC also helps to minimize possible conflicts and misunderstandings that jeopardize the construction schedule of any or all parties.

Successes of the AUCC include; improve communication and exchange information among all responsible parties, provide a vehicle for networking among utility representatives, consultants, contractors and governmental agencies ranging from State, County, Cities and Towns.

The main accomplishments of the AUCC is the development of the Public Improvement Project Guide (PIPG). The PIPG serves as a "baseline" for developing a successful utility coordination process. Most agencies have adopted and utilize the PIPG to develop their own approach to utility coordination.

A recent survey conducted by the AUCC shows that 70% of the agencies utilize the PIPG as the backbone for their specific utility coordination process.

The PIPG describes a "system" of communication and coordination elements that, when put in place, will help assure the relocation and installation of facilities in the rights-of-way with minimal problems. It is divided into 8 major parts:

1) Definitions

2) Recurring annual CIP activities and events

3) Standard (agency driven) projects

4) Utility driven projects

5) Municipal buildings projects

6) Fast track projects

7) Private development projects

8) Joint use trench

The success of the utility coordination process is predicated upon a full commitment by all governmental agencies, utilities, private developers, contractors and organizations that have or construct facilities in the public rights-of-ways.

The members of the AUCC trust that the PIPG will promote coordination, cooperation and communication between involved parties and will aid in more cost effective installations.