OTTAWA WATERPROOFING PRO

Digging & Locates

Excavating beside a foundation: locate requests, contractor safety duties, backfill and grading

4 Expert Answers from Waterproofing IQ

ottawawaterproofingpro.com/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. What does Ontario require when digging beside a neighbour's house?
2. Who is responsible for trench safety on a Kanata waterproofing dig?
3. Does Ontario's Code say what backfill can touch a waterproofed wall?
4. What happens if a waterproofing dig in Ottawa hits a buried line?

Q1

What does Ontario require when digging beside a neighbour's house?

When excavation may affect the stability of an adjacent building, Ontario's construction regulation (O. Reg. 213/91, s. 229) requires that an engineer specify the precautions in writing before the work begins. That is the rule that changes the job when you are digging close to a shared lot line or a neighbour's foundation.

Before anyone puts a shovel in the ground

Ontario's Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 requires a locate request before any digging starts. Ontario Dig Authority asks for that request at least 5 business days before you dig, and the service is free. The contractor doing the excavation is the excavator under the Act, so on a hired job the locate obligation falls to them. Ask in writing who will submit the request and when.

O. Reg. 213/91 also requires that a level strip at least 1 m wide be kept clear at the edge of any excavation. Beyond that, the engineering precautions required under s. 229 are the contractor's responsibility to arrange. The engineer's written specification is what you ask to see before work starts, not after.

A few things worth confirming with the contractor before signing:

- Who submits the locate request, and will you receive confirmation that utilities have responded?
- Has an engineer been engaged to assess the effect on the adjacent building, and will their written precautions be on site before digging begins?
- What is the scope of the excavation: which walls, what length, and how deep?
- Who pulls the building permit if the work is on the permit list (structural foundation repairs and drain tile replacement are both listed by the City of Ottawa)?

On the waterproofing side, the scope of the quote should name whether the wall will be dampproofed or waterproofed, and whether drain tile is being replaced and where it will discharge.
If you have a quote in hand, ask the contractor to show you the engineer's letter covering the adjacent-building precautions before you give any deposit.

Q2

Who is responsible for trench safety on a Kanata waterproofing dig?

The contractor is responsible for trench safety on an exterior waterproofing dig in Kanata. Ontario's construction regulation, O. Reg. 213/91, places that duty on the constructor at the site, not the homeowner.

Before anyone breaks ground, Ontario's Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 requires a locate request. Ontario Dig Authority asks for it at least 5 business days before digging starts. The contractor, as the excavator on a hired job, submits that request. Utilities mark their lines; work proceeds after they respond.

Once digging begins, O. Reg. 213/91 sets out what the contractor must do: services are located and marked before excavating, a level strip at least 1 m wide is kept clear at the edge of the excavation, and if the dig may affect the stability of an adjacent building, an engineer must specify the precautions in writing before work starts. Those are the contractor's obligations.

A few things worth knowing as the homeowner:

- You are not the excavator when you hire a contractor, so the locate duty sits with them. If you were digging yourself, the Act would make you the excavator and the locate would be your responsibility.
- Never enter the trench. That is not a homeowner task under any circumstances.
- If anything strikes a buried line or you smell gas during the work, leave the area and call emergency services from a safe place.

The single most useful person to ask first is the contractor, before signing anything: ask them to confirm in writing that they will submit the locate request to Ontario Dig Authority, their insurance details, and that they will obtain any required engineer's sign-off if the excavation is near a neighbouring structure.

Q3

Does Ontario's Code say what backfill can touch a waterproofed wall?

Ontario's Building Code does address this. Clause 9.12.3 sets out what backfill placed against a foundation wall must meet.

The requirements cover three things. The backfill must be placed so it does not damage the wall, the drain tile, any insulation, or the waterproofing or dampproofing membrane. Within 600 mm of the foundation, it must be free of debris and boulders larger than 250 mm. And it must be graded to prevent drainage toward the foundation after settling.

Those rules apply regardless of whether the wall is dampproofed or waterproofed. The Code does not name a specific fill material or gradation for the zone against a waterproofed wall beyond those three conditions, so the

contractor's method for protecting the membrane during backfilling matters. Clause 9.13.3.4 adds that a waterproofed surface must be protected from damage during backfilling; the Code does not name the protection material.

A fair quote for exterior waterproofing should spell out how the membrane will be protected before the trench is filled: what material goes against the membrane, how the backfill is placed and compacted, and how the finished grade will slope away from the wall. Ask the contractor to describe this in writing.

Ask for the written scope to show exactly what goes between the membrane and the backfill, and what happens if the membrane is found to be damaged when the trench is open.

Q4

What happens if a waterproofing dig in Ottawa hits a buried line?

Striking a buried line during a waterproofing excavation is a safety emergency first and a legal matter second. If a gas line is hit, leave the area immediately and call emergency services from a safe place. The same applies if you smell gas, see a severed cable, or notice water near any electrical source. Do not re-enter the excavation.

What the law requires before anyone digs

Ontario's Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 makes a locate request mandatory before any digging starts. Ontario Dig Authority asks for that request at least 5 business days before the excavation begins. The request is free. On a hired job, the contractor is the excavator under the Act, so requesting the locate is their responsibility, not yours. Ask for written confirmation that the locate was submitted and that all utilities responded before work starts.

Ontario's construction regulation (O. Reg. 213/91) also makes it the contractor's duty to have the services in and near the dig located and marked before excavating.

Where an excavation could affect the stability of a neighbouring building, an engineer specifies the precautions in writing (s.229). That is worth asking about if the dig is close to a shared wall, a garage, or a neighbouring property.

A few things to confirm with any contractor before they break ground:

- Written confirmation that a locate request was submitted to Ontario Dig Authority and that all utility responses were received
- How they will dig near the marked lines
- Their insurance details, in writing
- Who bears the cost if a line is damaged and service is interrupted

Ask your insurer in writing about your own policy as well.
The homeowner is not the excavator on a hired job, but you are still the one living with the disruption if a gas, hydro, water or telecom line is cut. Get the locate confirmation in writing before work starts.

If you want to reach Ottawa waterproofing contractors who work in this area, the request form on this page sends your details to contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Waterproofing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any waterproofing or foundation project. Some of this work needs a City building permit, and a free locate request is required before any digging. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawawaterproofingpro.com** for the latest

answers.