

MURPHY'S LAW

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Abstract: Murphy's Law is stated in general form and examples are given to illustrate the Law as it specifically relates to surveying.

Several years ago the general law delineating the behavior of inanimate objects established by Edsel Murphy came to my attention. Its very profundity was overwhelming at first, but further experience with the law has convinced me that it is the **only** law that is universally applicable. The contributions of Edsel Murphy's Law are not often fully appreciated and it is deemed that this is in large part due to the inherent simplicity of the law itself.

It is my intent to show that the Law of Murphy has produced numerous corollaries and it is hoped that by noting some examples, the reader may obtain a greater appreciation of Edsel Murphy, his law, and its ramifications in surveying.

As is well known to those versed in the state-of-the-art, Murphy's Law states that "If anything can go wrong, it will." Or, to state it in more exact mathematical form:

$$1 + 1 \nless 2$$

Where \nless is the mathematical symbol for "hardly ever is".

To show the all-pervasive nature of Murphy's Law, I offer a small sample of its applications to surveying.

1. No survey is repeatable.
2. All constants are variable.
3. In any given miscalculation, the fault will never be placed if more than one person is involved.
4. Any error that can creep in, will. It will be in the direction that will do the most damage to the calculation.
5. In any given computation, the figure that is most obviously correct will be the source of error.
6. In any given list of numbers there will be at least one with two digits transposed.
7. During computation, Murphy's Law supercedes both the Sine and Cosine Laws.
8. A plat of a subdivision will have mistakes.
9. Original drawings will be mangled by the copy machine.
10. The contractor will show up and stand around watching just when you discover that there is a mistake in your work.
11. The boss will show up just when you stop to take a break.

12. A tripod will always be bumped during the measurements, not before, not after.

13. An instrument will not be discovered to be out of adjustment until the big survey is completed.

14. The calculator battery will run down in the middle of a long, involved chain computation.

15. The distance meter battery will be discovered run down upon arrival at the most inaccessible point of the survey.

16. The iron rod that you have been digging for is always just to one side of the hole.

17. The rain starts after all the equipment is out and the theodolite set up and backsighted.

18. A point falling anywhere near water will be in the water.

19. A just sharpened pencil point will break.

20. Traffic will increase when you set up in the centerline of a street.

21. If a stake is driven into the ground, a dozer will run over it.

22. On a long sight someone out of hearing will stand in the line of sight.

23. In any given COGO run, a card having a coding or keypunching error will produce the worst possible results on the plot such as great circles or figures reduced to a mass of irrelevant lines.*

*No references are given. The source material was misplaced during preparation of this paper (another example of Murphy's Law). In accordance with the law, these misplaced documents will turn up on the day it is published.

(Editor's Note: The application of Murphy's Law to printing this in the "Texas Surveyor" would presume that a) the original would get lost between Editor McCullough's office and the desk of the assistant editor, b) that the fancy computer-mind of our typesetting equipment would be blown when such material passed through its memory bank, and c) the lay out artist would spill tea on the typeset copy.)

The Texas Surveyor

DIRECTORY ADDITION

The following office was omitted from the new Private Practice Directory.

R. Desmond Rasch Ltd.,

119 Lock Street East,

P.O. Box 6,

DUNNVILLE, Ontario.

N1A 2X1.

(R. Desmond Rasch)

Telephone: (416) 774-7188

Please insert this name in your new directory.

YOU KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE A BAD DAY WHEN:

- You wake up face down on the pavement
- You call suicide prevention and they put you on hold
- You put your bra on backwards and it fits better
- You see a 60 minutes news team waiting in your office
- Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles
- Your son tells you he wished Anita Bryant would mind her own business
- You want to put on the clothes you wore home from last night's party—and there aren't any
- You turn on the news and they're showing emergency routes out of the city
- Your twin sister forgets your birthday
- You wake up to discover that your waterbed broke and then realize you don't have a waterbed
- Your horn goes off accidentally and remains stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angels on the freeway
- Your wife wakes up feeling amorous and you have a headache!

THE LOST SURVEYOR

Finds himself treading the ground into a circle, his instruments useless, they are for straight lines, triangles and squares.

How could he get distracted forget the snug camp paid for by government or mining firm where his outfit sits by the fire?

Bewilderment starting with inattention boredom or curiosity has clouded his mind.

The plot is familiar
The ground is under his feet.

Stuart MacKinnon