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Helping find the answer help prevent utility strikes in the UK



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Much like any other industry where continual supply is taken for granted, the vast utility networks across the UK usually only reach the public interest when there is a problem. One of the scenarios when this can happen is when the utility network suffers a third party strike resulting in safety implications, compromised supply of the product and/or integrity of the network or delays for the general public.

In the UK we have previously relied on other countries' recent studies, such as the excellent DIRT report in the US produced by the Common Ground Alliance (CGA), to understand the possible causes for utility strikes. As good as the report is, it is based on a different country's operating practices and legislative background so only assumed conclusions can be relied upon.

We are proud to be part of an industry group formed of asset owners, contractors, service providers and associations and regulators, known as the Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG) (www.utilitystrikeavoidancegroup.org), where we have helped produce an inaugural report analysing over 5000 strikes in 2013 together with analysis and conclusions of the data received.

The report gives an insight into what, when, where and how strikes happened and begins to analyse the key question, **why**. The first four questions (what, when, where and how) are factually based and useful for trend analysis and insights but to understand **why** needs much more evaluation. It didn't surprise us (the USAG Data and Reporting Group) that our initial report didn't provide the 'silver bullet' to solve all utility strikes but it is clear from our initial research that the UK solution lies in a number of areas, following the CGA's principle that "damage prevention is a shared responsibility." These conclusions will develop over time and with the addition more questions for the following year's data (2014) which will be sent out very shortly but based on the results from 2013, getting just the "common sense" requirements consistently correct would significantly improve practices:

- Getting accurate records of all utilities before works commence
- Properly locating all assets on site
- Following excavation procedures correctly
- Having properly trained personnel using correct tools
- Working in an appropriate environment

As you will be aware, one of the methods in which an increasing number of asset owners, both large and small, are helping achieve the first point, i.e. getting their assets to the relevant people quickly and efficiently, is through the LSBUD (www.lsbud.co.uk) service. At LSBUD, we pride ourselves on providing a common sense approach to a difficult problem; rather than a third party having to make enquiries with each utility individually, providing access to all in one free, easy, open to all online portal makes sense and helps improve the industry for all.

If you would like to know more, please come and meet with the USAG team at the first Annual Conference being held at the Heathrow Academy on 16th September; for more information please register at the website www.utilitystrikeavoidancegroup.org.

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