

Safety Alert

Underground Service Strikes

17 April 2020

Background information

- Underground service strikes represent an ever-present threat to human life.
- This alert follows an increasing number of incidents whereby underground services have been damaged by hand tools and mechanical excavators by Highways England contractors in recent months.
- Whilst these incidents caused disruption to work and to the public, more importantly they all had the potential to cause serious injury or death to the operatives involved.
- The Highways Safety Hub have undertaken two 'Buried Services' campaigns within the last 5 years to raise awareness of the risks, they are hyperlinked [here](#) and [here](#). They provide best practice, share knowledge and lessons learned from real life events.
- Highways England wants to improve our performance in relation to underground services and therefore, ensure we all go home safe and well.



Recommendations

Please review your existing arrangements and systems of work in relation to working near underground services and assurance that your risk control measures are effectively implemented.

Areas for consideration for review may include:

- Design and planning processes – Are plans, drawings & surveys utilised appropriately?

- RAMS – Do they identify all hazards and mitigation and are they clear and easy to understand?
- Supervisors – Do they ensure that operatives understand the risks and the control measures to be implemented before setting to work?
- Permits to break ground – Are they clear and understood with appropriate check and review points in place?
- Operatives and supervisors – Do they have sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to work safely and use safe digging practices?
- Marking out / CAT tools – Are services marked in accordance with HSG47, CAT and Genny used appropriately?
- Do you have robust assurance processes in place to check compliance with arrangements?