INTRODUCTION

Last year we had 28 utility strikes in 12 months. From January to March this year there have been 3 utility strikes recorded and reported through 911, all in February; 2BT, 1LV.

In the two years on the contract we have made major strides in reducing the number of strikes we have and reaching for that zero incident goal.

However in April alone we have had 8 strikes already – whilst we all push to achieve targets and earn money, You/We need to stop rolling the dice and taking chances.

These can be avoided – we are now regularly going months without a strike, some teams have not had a utility strike whilst working on this contract.

That good performance is not down to just luck.

We have just had the 3 Zeros Stand Down which re-enforces:

- Zero Incidents – Utility Strikes
- Zero Harm – We do not want someone electrocuted and/or burnt
- Zero Compromise – You must follow the Method Statement & Safe Digging practices. Be your brother’s keeper; if someone is not following the safe digging practices then stop the job and help put it right.

SAFE WORKING: HOW TO ‘PACE’ THE WORK

General advice for achieving safe working near to underground services is to always ‘PACE’ the work. That is:

- **Plan** the work before starting;
  - Confirm Location. ✔ Is all equipment Serviceable & calibrated, (test button).
  - Access to notes on JTE. ✔ Team competent for CAT & Genny ✔ NRSWA

- **Ask** for information on buried service locations;
  - Confirm Drawings. ✔ Any local knowledge.
  - If unsure check with Supervisor. ✔ Brief other members of team.

- **Confirm** the exact location of buried services;
  - Use CAT & Genny. ✔ Mark up Utilities clearly, (use spray and/or chalk).
  - Clip to street lights. ✔ Put line into ducts. ✔ Trace visible cables into ground.

- **Excavate** using safe digging practices.
  - Non Metalic Handles on tools ✔ PPE in place. ✔ Cut & Dig to side of known services not on top. ✔ No forks picks or bars to be used ✔ Continual Cat. While digging. ✔ Treat all cables as live. ✔ No breaking out of cables encased in concrete.

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Safe Digging Practice

In line with the Company Health & Safety Procedure VHSP20 – Buried Services & Ground Penetration Work, the following constitutes the Safe Digging Practice:

- At least two people are to be in attendance at all times when a dig is being carried out.
- A suitable and sufficient point of work risk assessment is to be completed. (This will generally be done through the JTE hand held terminal).
- If in and/or effecting the ‘Highway’, Signage, lighting and guarding is to be laid out as per Chapter 8 of the Department of Transport Traffic Manual and the road works Code of Practice (the Red Book).
- A visual inspection of the area is to be carried out, paying particular attention to the location of:
  - Street lights
  - Valve covers
  - Hydrant markers
  - Meter boxes on building walls
  - Phone/CTV boxes
  - Signs of previous digs.
- Electronically scan the area with a Cable Avoidance Tool (CAT) and Signal Generator (Genny).
  - The CAT & Genny must be checked prior to use to see that they are within calibration date and then tested on a known live label or service.
  - Any located services are to be marked on both sides of the proposed dig area.
  - The located services are to be checked against the utility plans shown on the JTE hand held terminal.
- NO PICKS, POINTED BARS, FORKS OR SIMILAR TOOLS ARE TO BE USED DURING THE EXCAVATION WORKS.
- The following procedures must be adopted where identified buried services are beneath road surfaces or are covered with surface toppings.
  - The depth of the buried service must be established by hand digging as near as possible to the identified service but not directly on top of the service. The excavation initially is to be dug from the side/underneath to expose and identify the service.
  - The line of the identified service to be exposed must be clearly marked on the hard surface and similar lines marked 500mm either side of it, the Surface is then to be cut or broken through where practicable on the offset lines using a hand held disk cutter, if the distance is not possible due to street furniture etc. the measurement can be reduced to 300mm.
Where the buried service has a covering depth less than 250mm the hard surface material above the service must be broken out by hand, not using a breaker or disc cutter.

- At all times throughout the excavation the CAT and Genny are to be utilised in order to identify any previously undetected services within the pit.
- All strikes are to be reported immediately to the relevant utility undertaker, 911 and the supervisor. The excavation is to be evacuated and made safe. The gang is then to remain in place until released by the utility company engineers or supervisor.

Conclusion

So far, we have been exceptionally lucky that we have not suffered a fatality or serious injury on the contract as a result of the utility strikes we have had.

We have, however, in the first year, had one operative who went to hospital with shock after hitting an LV cable with a breaker and another who managed to let go of the wrecking bar he was using when he felt a tingle through his hands.

Both of these could have been a great deal more serious than they were, and in both cases neither of the operatives involved had been following the Safe Digging Practice at the time.

We have also had an incident in 2012 where a gang had disciplinary action taken for failure to report a strike, for not using the CAT & Genny and leaving an unsafe site, again not following the Safe Digging Practice and failing to report an incident as per the company process.

Make sure that you are aware of and understand the incident reporting process and then Take 5 to follow all of the steps within the Safe Digging Practice ensuring that you follow them fully at all times.

A copy of the 911 Incident Reporting process & number for Utility strikes, accidents, other incidents and Near Misses is on the following sheet, it is to be issued to each individual as part of this tool box talk, further information on reporting of accidents can be found within the Operative SHEQ Pocket Book.