

The dangers OF EXPEDITED TELECOMS WORK

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LSBUD, THE UK'S LEADING
ONLINE SAFE DIGGING
RESOURCE, DISCUSSES THE
DANGERS FOR THE SAFE
DIGGING INDUSTRY THAT
COME WITH EXPEDITED
TELECOMS WORK,
INCLUDING WHY STRIKES
CAN OCCUR AND HOW LSBUD
CAN HELP THE INDUSTRY TO
AVOID THEM.



WHY DO TELECOMS STRIKES OCCUR?

The telecoms industry has evolved significantly over recent years, digging hundreds of thousands of kilometres of trenches to accommodate new, faster fibre. The government's current targets are to supply 85% of premises with nationwide gigabit-broadband this year, and 99% by 2030. Despite most fibre cables already being in the ground with 79% of UK homes now having a gigabit-capable broadband, the hard work has to continue, especially with the remaining 20% of the rollout being located in some of the hardest areas to reach. That means this project still requires a significant amount of breaking ground and planning, and with the time constraints closing in, the government and broadband companies will be looking to get it done as fast as possible.

With so much new infrastructure still being built out across the UK, the chance of hitting another underground asset remains high. Those responsible for digging and establishing new telecoms systems will need to spend time planning before excavation to ensure other utility networks are mapped and accounted for. Not doing so can have severe consequences, which not only puts the project and those doing the digging at risk, but also significantly impacts the local community and environment.

These government targets mean telecoms work is still a priority. As a consequence, the sharing of asset location data is now paramount. Without regular, accurate updates, understanding what new utilities have been established in a given location becomes increasingly challenging.

This is concerning, as it means fibre optic cables have been put in the ground quicker than telecoms companies could register the new assets on search services such as LSBUD. This means there are crucial telecoms assets missing from search results, which can lead to unnecessary asset strikes.

When you think of telecoms strikes, you likely consider the person doing the digging and the network operator involved, however the impact can be much more far reaching. Those in the surrounding community are often heavily reliant on having access to a stable connection. Indeed, a recent study by Good Things Foundation found that one in ten people would prefer to cut back on food or heating than lose internet access. This shows you the important role broadband plays in modern life, and makes it even more uncomfortable that so much fibre is being left unprotected. The telecoms industry cannot afford to overlook this.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA SHARING

Safe digging is most effective when you have as many asset owners as possible sharing information about their networks. This creates a 'virtuous circle', making the system more comprehensive, which in turn protects the people taking on digging projects. The key to a successful virtuous circle is collaboration, participation and data sharing.

The more asset information supplied to LSBUD, the greater our ability to generate increasingly clear pictures of the UK's underground infrastructure. In doing so, we can offer an instant, vital assessment that

protects both the assets and the people doing the digging.

For those doing the digging, it means greater safety and fewer interruptions. This allows them to complete their projects more efficiently, and results in deadlines being met without safety being compromised. Without delays companies are free to take on more work, and kick off new projects, which from a financial perspective is the ambition.

From an asset owner perspective, eliminating third-party damages has a drastic impact on the business' bottom line, as well as its reputation. Network providers not sharing their data with a collaborative portal can see the benefits that come from protecting their pipes and cables and choose to become part of the system. This means we have more information than ever before to protect people, and the virtuous circle starts again.

ACCURATE REPORTING IS KEY

Accurate data is crucial for the safe digging industry to spot trends and make sensible predictions. We need to be operating as effectively as possible to ensure the safe digging community remains protected.

However, asset owners and those digging can sometimes be less than forthcoming when reporting damages. Reasons for this could include data not being recorded well enough, and reporting being conducted in different ways by asset owners. Additionally, companies may fear that sharing damages data will have a negative impact on their reputation, both internally and externally. This culminates in asset owners both being unable to,



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and sometimes failing to see the value in, sharing data.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The easiest way to highlight best practice whilst digging is to pick a particular example.

NYnet, established in 2007 and tasked with improving connectivity and broadband services across the North of England, provides connection to important public sector facilities such as hospitals, doctors surgeries and social care organisations. Many of its connections are critical and since its establishment, it now operates a high-capacity fibre network across the region.

NYnet understood that it needed to better protect its vital assets from accidental damage, and that sharing underground infrastructure information was the best way to do that. Before joining the LSBUD portal, the company employed a contractor to handle search enquiries – a time-consuming process.

However, after joining LSBUD, NYnet found that the hassle-free automated process was far quicker, and enabled it to protect its underground network in a matter of minutes. In 2024, it was able to respond rapidly to over 400 searches every month, which came in from an array of sources, including utility companies and telecoms providers.

With LSBUD handling asset location requests, NYnet is free to focus on providing the best possible service to its community.

Alastair Taylor, Deputy Chief Executive at NYnet explains: “If it wasn’t for the service LSBUD provides, smaller organisations like ours would struggle to compete in a market that’s predominantly dominated by huge, national players.”

IN SUMMARY

Safety must always be a top priority when digging.

We urge careful planning and attention

to keep our valuable underground infrastructure intact. The virtuous circle of safe digging is a testament to what can be achieved with true collaboration and shared responsibility from asset owners across all sectors.

Despite the drop in momentum of the ultrafast broadband rollout, with the government prioritising the final 20% of its target, more telecoms-related digging is sure to occur – meaning safety is now more important than ever.

If everyone commits to the rules of ‘subscribe, share and search’, we will continue to see the safe digging community grow, staying safer in the process with more projects completed efficiently.

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