



Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG)

2022 Business Plan

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2.0 Executive Summary

The Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG) is the body established within the utility industry whose main purpose is to help reduce the number and severity of underground utility strikes arising from work activities in proximity to such services. The primary role of USAG is to provide a forum for employers, including asset owners and contractors, and industry partners to influence and promote improved standards of health and safety within the utility sector. It has become the leading provider of industry knowledge for safe excavation around utilities through its free access to USAG web page and Linked In sites, and as such has been endorsed by both the HSE and IOSH (as detailed in the Appendices). It was the winner of the 2012 NJUG Innovation award and the USAG Charter now has several hundred signatories.

USAG operates on a voluntary basis with no direct funding other than the support offered by Member Company organisations, in particular those who sit on the Steering Group. Whilst there have been considerable achievements with this strategy, an extension of the group's remit and influence would require direct funding. This could be realised by making USAG a company limited by guarantee to enable fundraising to promote its aims and objectives, and this remains a consideration of the group. In the meantime, USAG's remit remains the open sharing of information and best practice to promote safe working and improved performance.



3.0 Company Overview & Vision

USAG was formed in 2008 as a collaboration between asset owners, specialist contractors and industry representatives with an ambition to share knowledge and experiences to reduce the harm caused by underground utility strikes.

It is the body established within the utility industry whose main purpose is to help reduce the number and severity of underground utility strikes arising from work activities in proximity to such services, as well as being mindful of other underground assets including fuel pipelines. This includes, but is not limited to, construction, demolition, excavation, fencing, and streetworks activities. The utility industry is defined as the electricity, gas, water, waste, and telecommunications sectors, and comprises both direct employers and contractor organisations including their supply chains and service providers. USAG's activities are designed to promote continuous improvement in the health, safety and welfare of both employees and members of the public, and supports the objectives of the HSE Strategy 'Helping Great Britain Work Well'.

3.1. Terms of Reference

The primary role of USAG is to provide a forum for employers and industry partners to influence and promote improved standards of health and safety within the utility, civil and construction industries.

This will include:

- The development of a consistent approach by all members to ensure that legal duties are complied with as an absolute minimum;
- The sharing and promotion of good practice in all work activities (before, during and after construction) carried out in proximity of utility services;
- The support of industry initiatives and campaigns designed to reduce the incidence of utility strikes;
- The promotion of the reporting and analysis of data from all USAG members to identify any industry trends with a view to developing responsive actions;
- The maintenance of close liaison with other relevant groups within the utility sector;
- The maintenance of close dialogue with HSE and other relevant regulatory bodies and stakeholders as necessary;
- Raising awareness amongst other key parties including designers, training providers and equipment manufacturers of their responsibilities for and influence on the provision of utility services;
- The identification of new and emerging hazards and risks;
- The development and promotion of industry wide programmes and initiatives, and relevant guidance as necessary, to promote training and skills related issues.

3.2. Past Successes

- Charter

A core aspect and success of USAG is the group's Charter. This was launched in April 2012 by Transport Minister Norman Baker MP who stated "The Safe Dig Charter has been compiled by the utilities sectors and contractors to ensure the highest standards of safety and best practice when carrying out maintenance work on the vital services for our homes and businesses. In particular it will help those carrying out work avoid disrupting supplies through accidental strikes on utilities in the ground"



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The Charter was revised and updated in November 2018 and now sets out the nine essential commitments that signatories must make to reduce the risk of harm while undertaking excavation work. The Charter sets out safe working practices, and also now includes the requirement for all USAG asset owner and contractor members to submit annual data on damage incidents. This data is compiled into an annual report to highlight required areas of focus to further reduce damages. This report is referenced within this document.

Asset owners who become signatories are sending a very clear and public message that they support and expect adherence to good practice when working on their assets. This encourages contractors working on behalf of utility providers to become signatories and these contractors are, in turn, encouraged to promote the Charter throughout their supply chains and service providers. This cascade effect encourages even the smallest subcontractors to familiarise themselves with good practice in excavating around buried services.

- **Toolkit**

The next step in implementing USAG's core aims and objectives was the development of tools setting out best practice. The group collaborated with the HSE in the production of the revised HSG47 guidance, "Avoiding Danger from Underground Services", and has adopted and published the tools developed by the Best Practice in Avoiding Underground Services (BPAUS). Policies, procedures, and supporting forms that were developed by the leading contractors in the sector are now freely available via the USAG website so that even small companies and contractors can benefit from their experience and knowledge. These toolkits continue to be reviewed and updated as necessary, and will be regularly refreshed when new procedures, equipment and working practices are introduced.

- **Industry coordination**

USAG continues to expand in influence and form associations with other groups that undertake related work in order to become the national resource for advice regarding safe excavation. The Joint Utilities Damage Avoidance Forum (JUDAF) has been rebranded as USAG (Scotland) as a discrete entity with its own programme of work, and similarly leverages the USAG website for best practice materials.

Similarly, USAG has sought to participate in and shape the outputs of work programmes that will directly affect the governance, practice and competence of the industry workforce undertaking excavation activities. This includes liaison with Government, skills bodies (EU Skills), professional associations (ICE), and standards making bodies (BSI).



3.3. Future Aims

USAG has been successful in enhancing awareness of utility strike avoidance amongst its members and will continue to do so as one of its main objectives. However, there are ongoing challenges that prevent USAG from reaching its full potential.

- **Market presence**

Many signatories are not aware of developments in the tools, technology, and guidance available and are therefore not fully utilising these resources. Furthermore, there are many parts of the construction industry not directly related to the utilities sector, but which nonetheless are involved in utility strikes. These businesses are largely unaware of USAG and therefore cannot take advantage of the BPAUS toolkit. In order to overcome these challenges USAG needs to continue communicating and promoting its guidance and resources by various means.

- **Deliver the services as identified in the following section**

Further details and information are available in the following section, setting out USAG's work on the annual utility strike report and training and competency issues.



4.0 Services Provided & Operations Plan

4.1. Services Provided

To deliver its aims and objectives as identified in this document, USAG will promote the following services, all of which are freely available to download from the USAG web site:

- **Toolkit**

Continuous development of the USAG toolkit to provide information and guidance on the tools and practices necessary for safe working in the proximity of underground utility services, including Planning, Training, Competency, Permitting, Inspection, and Record Keeping procedures.
- **Utility Strike Report**

The Utility Strike Report analyses utility strike data from USAG members and other construction partners. The reports identify asset damage trends and where further industry improvements can be made. A number of Utility Strike Reports have now been published and uploaded to the website, and issued to USAG Members for further circulation. Reports were formerly issued on a biannual basis, but are now issued annually.
- **Training & Competence**

The promotion of a national standard of training (EUSR) for safe excavation that enables contractors to move between contracts or utility suppliers without the need for excessive retraining. This builds on the benefits of collaboration between Asset Owners and Contractors across industry, working with USAG members to develop a more efficient and effective approach to training provision, accreditation, and competence. USAG members work collaboratively to improve quality, ensure legislative compliance, and develop the competence of the industry workforce by:

 - Development and use of existing best practice to support common industry specific training programmes, removing the duplication of training as employees move between employers and/or contracts;
 - Raising the standard of training delivery through promotion of the USAG's approved training specifications and content.

This should help reduce overhead costs associated with the management and maintenance of training programmes and records through economies of scale on the purchasing of training provision. A national standard also helps align the competencies and abilities of individuals, and provides employers with a robust mechanism to demonstrate the skills of their workforce.



4.2. Steering Group

A Steering Group comprised of USAG members from across the Industry oversees delivery of the above services, and includes representation from the following groups:

- Industry associations
 - Asset Owners (Electricity, Gas, Water, Telecommunications, etc.)
 - Contractors
 - Service Providers
 - Industry bodies
- **Responsibilities of Steering Group**

The members of the Steering Group meet regularly to govern and oversee the objectives of USAG and facilitate the promotion of best practice. Members possess the appropriate skills, knowledge, and experience to serve the needs of the group. Representatives of the HSE and other interested third parties are also invited to attend Steering Group meetings.

The option remains for USAG to become a company limited by guarantee in the event of agreement to move to being a funded body. In this eventuality members of the Steering Group would be guarantors for USAG Ltd. and appoint Directors in accordance with Articles of Association.

- **Additional Members**

The Steering Group will retain the authority to expand its membership following agreement of all represented parties to ensure it continues to reflect the wider USAG membership. Members of the Steering Group are expected to actively contribute to the collaborative work and represent not only their own organisation but the wider requirements of their sector and the utility industry as a whole.
- **Communication of information**

Outputs and meeting papers of USAG will be disseminated as widely as possible; all suitable information will be published on the USAG web site, and member organisations will be encouraged to provide links to USAG within their own publications and web sites where appropriate.

Website (www.utilitystrikeavoidancegroup.org)

Effective use will be made of the USAG website to publish information and guidance, promote news and events, and issue publications. The website will be maintained and updated on a regular basis in order to connect and communicate with the industry, and ensure that it remains an effective resource for all USAG Members. The website is currently managed and sponsored by PelicanCorp UK Ltd.

LinkedIn page www.linkedin.com/company/utility-strike-avoidance-group

Use of the LinkedIn pages as a means of dissemination of news, events, and key information relevant to the group. It also serves as a method of recruitment for new members to the Safe Digging Charter and News Group.



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4.3. Governance

The Steering Group is accountable to the member organisations represented within the wider membership.

- **Decision making**
Meetings of the group will be deemed quorate for the purposes of making decisions when there is representation from at least one each of an asset owner, contractor and third party organisation; any decision to then be ratified by the whole group by correspondence.
- **Frequency of Meetings**
The committee will aim to meet not less than four times each year to provide business continuity.
- **Chair**
USAG will be chaired by a member of the Steering Group and consideration given to rotating the chair at regular intervals or as resources dictate.
- **Secretariat**
ENA SHE Team will provide secretariat and support services to the group to ensure agendas, meetings, outputs, and actions are progressed in accordance with the group's aims and objectives.

4.4. Working Groups

USAG has established and empowered relevant Working Groups to carry forward the agreed work programme, and ensure that they operate with clear terms of reference and deliverable objectives.

Working Groups have been set up to meet the needs of the following areas:

- Toolkit Development
- Data and Reporting
- Training and Competence
- Stakeholder Engagement & Communications
- Web Site Development
- USAG Membership

All of these groups are comprised of individuals or groups of individuals, and are designed to support achievement of the purposes set out under USAG Services and the group's core aims and objectives.



5.0 Marketing & Communications

5.1. Key Objectives

1. To raise the profile and awareness of the work of USAG in the industry;
2. To share information and new initiatives with existing USAG Members;
3. To encourage more companies to sign up to the USAG Charter.

5.2. Target audience segmentation and key messages

The table below outlines the overarching USAG purpose and messages, and the reason that organisations and individuals should be encouraged to engage with the group. It lists USAG target audiences in broadly descending order of importance, and the messages for each audience type.

The UK's principal voice for underground service strike avoidance

	Most important	→→→→→	→→→→→	→→→→→
Member organisations	As a member of USAG you have access to industry leading information and support	USAG is the name you trust in the industry	USAG can provide you with practical tools to help you do business more safely	USAG is the voice of safety in the utilities industry
Potential supporters (larger companies)	As a member of USAG you have access to industry leading information and support	USAG is the name you trust in the industry	USAG can provide you with practical tools to help you do business more safely	USAG is the voice of safety in the utilities industry
Potential signatories (smaller companies)	As a member of USAG you have access to industry leading information and support	USAG can provide you with practical tools to help you do business more safely and effectively	You don't need to be a member to get support	
Media	USAG is the voice of safety in the utilities industry	USAG is at the forefront of safety innovation	USAG can provide spokespeople to speak on relevant subjects	USAG is the name you trust in the industry
Political	USAG is the voice of safety in the utilities industry	USAG can provide spokespeople to speak on relevant subjects	USAG is the name you trust in the industry	
Public	USAG is the voice of safety in the utilities industry	USAG can provide details of how to work more safely and effectively	USAG members are committed to providing less disruption on site / a better image	
Other stakeholders / industry (e.g. local authorities, HSE)	We can work together to achieve shared aims	There are opportunities to collaborate with USAG to encourage safety within the industry		



5.3. Analysis of other industry bodies

There are several organisations in the same sectors that USAG operates in that are looking to achieve similar or complementary aims. These organisations could be key to USAG's success and working relationships are encouraged to help promote safe working practices and enhance USAG's position in the marketplace. Details of USAG's liaison work with these organisations are available through the Steering Group.

5.4. Communications Plan

Please refer to the website for details on USAG communications and resources. The effectiveness of marketing campaigns is reviewed on a quarterly basis at the Steering Group meetings.

5.5. Marketing Campaigns

Listed below are a number of campaigns and ideas to stimulate awareness of USAG, and its aims and objectives.

- E-marketing:

- 5.5.1. Website

- To be kept up to date with recent articles and fresh content, including case studies and SHE Bulletins.

- 5.5.2. E- Newsletter

- An electronic newsletter to be sent out quarterly or half yearly.

- 5.5.3. Social Media

- Using LinkedIn and other effective forms of social media accounts in accordance with the Communications Plan.

- Traditional Marketing

- 5.5.4. Conferences

- Events will be open to all members and signatories and will provide an update on the work that has been undertaken by USAG, promote the materials and tools available, and present future developments.

- 5.5.5. Industry Events

- USAG members to attend industry events and conferences for the utility and construction industry sectors. This will involve the production of exhibition materials and flyers for those visiting a company or USAG stand.

- 5.5.6. Flyers

- Production of flyers promoting USAG to be sent to Members, handed out at events etc.



6.0 Financial Plan

Membership of USAG and the use of its publications will remain free of charge. Any organisation or individual will be able to sign up to the Charter and use the guidance and best practice toolkits available on the web site.

Whilst USAG has been successful since its inception and delivered a number of significant results, this has been delivered without any budget with representatives providing their time and resources free of charge. Whilst this can continue, there are significant benefits to the Steering Group's outputs if more financial resources were available, which would enable developments in marketing, industry awareness, publications, and IT developments. This could take the form of a model similar to the Common Ground Alliance (CGA) in the United States where members are recognised in tiered (Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze) 'Sponsorships' relating to the size of the donation given. USAG in its current form is not able to acquire debts or commit to any costs unless these are paid on its behalf by a member or third party.



7.0 Appendix - Current Steering Group Members

Steering Group

The Steering Group is made up of a number of individuals from across the Industry, including members from:

- Energy Networks Association
- LSBUD (Linesearch Before U Dig)
- PelicanCorp
- Contractor organisations
- Electricity transmission and distribution operators
- Gas network operators
- Telecommunications providers
- Water and sewerage companies
- Health & Safety Executive
- Highways England
- HS2
- Network Rail
- Equipment manufacturers

8.0 Appendix – List of Charter Signatories

Please refer to the USAG website: www.utilitystrikeavoidancegroup.org

Full lists of the Charter signatories can be found at:

<http://www.utilitystrikeavoidancegroup.org/charter-signatories.html>.



9.0 Appendix – Endorsements

9.1. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Endorsement

More companies than ever before are now involved in digging holes across the UK. Latest estimates indicate that around 4 million holes are dug each year by utility companies with many more dug as part of construction projects. Third party damage to underground services continues to be a source of danger and financial loss to workers, members of the public, utility companies and contractors.

HSE's mission is to prevent death, injury, and ill health and this cannot be achieved in isolation. HSE needs support and help from leaders who are committed to promulgating a common-sense and practical approach to health and safety. We therefore commend the work of the Utilities Strike Avoidance Group (USAG) in sharing and promoting best practice across the utilities, their contractors, and partners to minimize the number of underground utility strikes.

Small businesses make an important contribution to Great Britain's economic prosperity. However, they also account for a considerable number of health and safety incidents. That is not to say that SMEs are inherently dangerous. Rather, some SME's conduct activities that carry a high level of risk, including excavations.

SME's often find goal-based health and safety management difficult to apply. Finding new ways to help SMEs understand how to comply with health and safety law in a manner proportionate to the risks posed by their work activities is a key priority for HSE

The 'Safe Digging Charter' has been prepared by industry specialists to provide guidance to SMEs on the practical elements of excavation. The Charter's supporting guidance documents are simple as well as comprehensive and easy to adopt.

9.2. Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Endorsement

IOSH fully supports this proactive industry-led initiative and wholeheartedly agrees that risk assessment, planning, safe systems of work, and competence are all essential for ensuring that digging and excavating are safe.

We need to make sure that all workers involved in excavations avoid accidentally striking the myriad of underground services, including electricity cables and gas pipes. Health and safety professionals are committed to helping employers and workers by raising awareness and promoting good working practices.

The latest HSE guidance 'Avoiding danger from underground services' highlights the devastating consequences of failing to manage such work properly, with workers being killed or seriously injured from striking live underground cables. These tragedies are preventable and IOSH believes we must act to ensure every worker goes home safely at the end of the working day.

The Institution would urge all organisations involved in commissioning or conducting any ground or excavation work to renew their efforts to raise health and safety standards and to sign up to this Charter. We all need to work together to make sure accidental contact with underground services is a tragedy of the past.



10.0 Statement of Confidentiality & Non- Disclosure

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