

Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG)

Meeting minutes – Tuesday 6th December 2022

Steering Group meeting (ENA Offices/MS Teams)

ATTENDEES

| Name | Initials | Company |
|-------------------|----------|----------------|
| Jim Denholm | JD | SPEN |
| Bryan Woods | BW | Amey |
| Jo-Anne Michael | JM | HSE |
| Greg McGinn | GMc | BT Openreach |
| Robert Burns | RBu | Costain |
| Paul West | PW | UKPN |
| Steve Crossland | SC | Balfour Beatty |
| Matthew Hopkinson | MH | National Grid |
| Freddy Werpel | FW | Pelican Corp |
| Laura Knight | LK | LSBUD |
| David Gibb | DC | HS2 |
| Billy McCann | BM | Cadent Gas |
| Mike Leppard | ML | ENA |
| Jamie Reeve | JR | ENA |
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APOLOGIES

| Name | Initials | Company |
|-----------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Eddie Eaves | EE | Highways England |
| Julia Evans | JE | Highways England |
| Andrew Pinkham | AP | United Living |
| Simon Kruyswijk | SK | Virgin/O ₂ |
| Duncan Robins | DR | Virgin/O ₂ |
| Steve Welsh | SW | SGN |
| Amanda Chamen | AC | HS2 |
| George Foulger | GF | Clancy Group |
| Andrew Morris | AM | Cadent Gas |
| Mark Downing | MD | BT Openreach |
| Brett Stinton | BS | NWL |
| Joe Docherty | JD | Amey |
| Richard Broome | RB | LSBUD |
| Aaron Eaton | AE | UKPN |
| Iain Boardman | IB | Costain |
| David Burgess | DB | Network Rail |
| Gareth Mullen | GMu | Thames Water |

MEETING NOTES AND ACTIONS

| 1. Welcome & Introductions | |
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| <p>ML welcomed members to the Q4 2022 Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG) meeting, which was held as a hybrid in person and Microsoft Teams call. A round table of introductions was undertaken as new and deputising colleagues were attending. A number of apologies were received from colleagues as above.</p> <p>JR provided an update on recent and forthcoming changes at ENA. This included changes to the ENA SHE Team, a review of the ENA SHE Working Group structure, and an expectation of a greater level of engagement between USAG and the ENA Public Safety Committee in 2023 with potential support via an ENA member company chair.</p> <p>.</p> | |
| Actions | |

| 2. Meeting minutes – 6 th September 2022 | |
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| <p><u>Accuracy</u></p> <p>There were no amendments to the draft minutes, which were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.</p> | |
| <p><u>Actions</u></p> <p><u>Section 2 – Steering Group (SG) governance</u></p> <p>Several issues are being considered and/or developed including Steering Group membership, SG member expectations, USAG member expectations, and a USAG work plan. A basic 2022 plan is in place comprised of key regular activity such as meetings, Data Reports, and events but this needs to be expanded and more detail provided. Future work plans also need to incorporate wider aspects such as alignment with the HSE Strategy. This issue is on the agenda at Item 7.</p> <p><u>Section 3 – USAG communications</u></p> <p>FW will provide an update on the web site and communications work at agenda Item 5. This will include an overview of the development of the new web site.</p> <p>Holding a dedicated USAG event was supported, but it was agreed that work needs to be completed in 2023 on the governance arrangements, working groups, and work plan first.</p> <p><u>Section 5 – Events 2022</u></p> <p>An invitation had been circulated to the ENA Public Safety event and several USAG members had attended. Similarly, the CECA seminar had been supported by SG members, and SC had circulated some post event information. Reports on both and updates on other events will be provided at agenda Item 3.</p> | |

Section 6 – Costain project

RBu reported that the Costain/National Highways innovation project had been completed. This had focussed on routes to improve the analysis and use of data, and the report will be circulated when available.

Actions

3. Campaigns/Events 2022

CECA

Feedback was provided by SC on the CECA Safe Digging event held at Loughborough University on 19th October and the collective messages for all utilities. These included the need for collaborative working, a whole system approach (based on CDM principles), and the importance of collating and analysing data. Over 80 delegates attended from across industry, and USAG members actively contributed via the presentations and panel discussions. There was an emphasis during the day on the need for all stakeholders to apply HSG47 guidance, and the additional performance improvements that can be achieved through the training in and application of positive behaviours.

Colleagues find such events useful, but there is an awareness that all sectors are trying to achieve the same safety outcomes and also employing the same approach and messages, and there is merit therefore in pooling resource and holding joint events and promotional activity where possible. The concern is that consistent, ongoing messaging is not reaching the right people and changing their behaviours; not only are the number of incidents increasing at present but also the strike rate.

ENA

A similar workshop was held at ENA soon after the CECA event. This was organised by the ENA Public Safety Committee and featured presentations from ENA, electricity network companies, and HSE followed by breakout discussions. Similar messages and actions arose covering the need for communications and campaigns, stakeholder engagement, design issues, collaborative working, and acting on USAG data report recommendations. A further follow up event is planned for 2023.

Actions

4. Industry reports

A few reports and background information had been circulated with the meeting papers outlining wider work on strike avoidance.

2021 Damage Information Reporting Tool (DIRT) Report

This is issued by the Common Ground Alliance (CGA) and the report highlights that over the last three years incidents have either plateaued or increased whilst the root causes of incidents broadly remain the same. There is also a correlation between increased construction activity and the number of 811 calls and damage incidents. There is need to improve the quality of data which will help focus attention on priority areas and help evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

The most common root causes are lack of notification of work (dial before you dig), horizontal drilling, incorrect use of equipment, locating errors, and incorrect utility records. Gas pipes and telecoms assets incur the most strikes mainly due to poor excavation and locating practices.

Recommendations in the report focus on the need for improved stakeholder communications and awareness, education and training of locator personnel and locating practices, and improvements in data collation, quality, and reporting processes. The effectiveness of policies, training, and enforcement models need to be assessed and the impact on strike rates measured following any changes to these processes. Similarly, the impact from improvements in the accuracy and availability of maps needs to be assessed.

Discussion of the findings highlighted that many of the root causes are common to those observed in the UK. Wider issues include the need to address not only the emerging utility skills gap, but also the need to upskill existing staff and improve the competence and experience levels of supervisors. Some companies are looking at developing integrated teams to ensure the required balance of skill sets, whilst others are introducing and evaluating new means of training to achieve the same end goal. There are often different solutions for different work scenarios requiring specific skills sets, equipment, and roles.

Streetworks UK (SWUK)

A SWUK report 'Digging Down to Level Up' has recently been published, which is more of a policy statement than technical assessment report. The focus is on the installation and maintenance work required to enable the rollout of required assets including telecom broadband, electric vehicles, and heat pumps etc. This will result in a significant increase in the level and number of street and roadworks excavations to help implement national initiatives such as the fibre roll out and Net Zero targets, requiring £14bn of national investment per year.

The report refers to perceived crunch points, including the level of asset replacement and new installations needed, the skills and workforce requirements for this work, the required improvements in safety and efficiency, and the importance of increased innovation. All these factors are enablers that will assist the future growth in UK productivity. Individual chapters in the report cover the barriers, risks, and recommendations to implement the digitalisation, innovation, workforce, collaboration, and decarbonisation needed, and some of the streetworks projects and schemes that will contribute to this.

Actions

5. USAG work

FW provided an update on communications work and activity, illustrated by social media analytics of the various tools employed, most of which again demonstrate an increase in the level of contact and engagement with stakeholders. Stakeholder access tools include the web site, Linked In, Twitter, and the Infoline, but it is believed these are reaching managerial level staff and those already exhibiting good practice and that further engagement routes are needed for field staff and homeowners such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok etc. These are more interactive social media tools more commonly used by the younger population and which routinely reach greater numbers.

Members were supportive of exploring these tools and some businesses are similarly considering future communication routes. Other opportunities include the optimum timing of posting news items and notifications in line with the analytics; at present posts are routinely published weekly on the same day and time.

A prototype of the new USAG web site was demonstrated with plans to launch in the new year. This will build on the good ratings of the current site, which continues to receive a good engagement rate with peaks recorded when new items are posted supported by social media promotion. The ongoing objective for USAG to improve levels of awareness and knowledge through guidance and new stories remains important as incidents continue to occur and so there is a need to reach and engage more stakeholders. This needs to include safety advice, strike report recommendations, training promotion, and streetworks news and initiatives.

The new web site will host and promote the same information but in a clearer and more engaging and accessible format through a series of headline tabs and supporting pages, accompanied by improved graphics and routes to engage with USAG (e-mail, social media, newsletter, Charter etc.). Members need to continue to support this communications work with information, guidance, and campaign material to help populate the web site and enable regular publication of newsletters, press releases, and events. FW will continue to develop the new site and then issue a link for Steering Group consultation and feedback prior to the launch in early 2023.

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| Actions | FW will develop the new site and issue a link for Steering Group consultation and feedback prior to its launch | FW/All (Q1 2023) |
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6. Wider issues

National Underground Asset Register (NUAR)

Information continues to be published and shared on progress with the NUAR initiative. The pilot areas which form the basis of the roll out and their particular aspects are the North East (data sharing and onboarding), London (feasibility study, work with the GLA, urban specific challenges), and Wales (link between underground and overground assets, work with the Welsh Government). These areas are intended to go live in March 2023 with a deadline of December 2024 for the whole of England and Wales.

A summary of responses to the Government consultation run between April – June 2022 was published in October. This was aimed at setting out the case for NUAR (costs, organisations involved, timescales to receive and process utility data), determine the need for legislation to implement the scheme (mandatory or voluntary, Government or public body administration), and routes to access the information (charging schemes for asset owners or statutory undertakers, non-statutory users). There was no overall consensus from stakeholders on charging schemes or responsibilities, but a majority hold the view that NUAR should be managed by Government, that data security needs to be ensured, and that legislation will be needed for 100% participation by all parties.

A discussion highlighted some of the perceived benefits and challenges of the proposed NUAR scheme. Most members are engaged in the process to some degree, and there is a real need for collaboration if the objectives of this project are to be delivered. However, it was noted that private networks are not included within the scope of work, and that NUAR does not alter the challenges or change the safe approach to work needed by frontline operational staff once the asset location information is secured.

WS Atkins, who have been appointed to manage and deliver the project, will need information from all asset owners (statutory undertakers and others) for the tool to be effective and both they and users will need to understand how to implement the planned system. It is also unclear what form or type of legislation may be needed to implement NUAR. An invitation had been extended to ENA to attend/observe the work of one of the Regional User Groups; this had not yet been taken up, but all agreed it would be useful for USAG to be represented.

Streetworks UK (SWUK)

There was no recent update from SWUK, but a webinar had been held on 21st October as part of a wider briefing to stakeholders and those not directly involved in the project. EA had requested a summary of the Phase 2 sampling programme and a revised version of the draft Protocol before the end of the year, and a SWUK-EA meeting had also been planned so an update is needed on this. RPS211, effectively an exemption to transport non-hazardous waste spoil, will expire in April 2023 and the Protocol will then be introduced at that point so further progress needs to be made.

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| Actions | ENA had been invited to attend/observe one of the Regional NUAR User Groups; it was agreed it would be useful for USAG to be represented | ML (Next meeting) |
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7. USAG 2023

The group discussed the required approach and work in 2023 to support the key aims and objectives of USAG. It was agreed that a one year forward look was sufficient at this stage, and that some work is already advanced and being managed well by individuals such as the communications and web site work by FW and strike data collation by the Data Reporting WG. Both are key programmes, and the former is a tool that supports all USAG work and engages members, end users, and wider stakeholders which is a crucial part of USAG's remit.

Other work currently in hand includes development of the USAG work plan for which extra information and detail is now required. This needs to incorporate routine USAG work and the recommendations in the Strike Reports, but also some of the more challenging issues such as NUAR, engagement with Government bodies, strategic positioning etc.

There was strong support to refresh and reinvigorate the working groups that were originally set up. These could be developed to enable other USAG members to be involved, provide a focus for work on specific issues (Data & Reporting, Communications, Toolkit, Training), and enable the Steering Group to function as the overarching strategic group that it was designed to be. Work could be conducted within the working groups outside of the SG on the outputs of the work plan, and then be fed back to the main group thereby enabling greater progress to be made.

The priority order to progress this work is to complete the Steering Group governance documents, develop and approve the 2023 work programme, and then re-establish the working groups (define, set up, and populate). The aim will be complete this framework in Q1/Q2 2023.

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| Actions | The priority is to complete the Steering Group governance documents, develop and approve the 2023 work programme, and then re-establish the working groups | All (Q1/2 2023) |
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8. USAG 2023 meeting dates

Meetings

There were insufficient SG members in the meeting to set the 2023 meeting schedule so ML will circulate some proposed dates to the group.

AOB

It was noted that the Streetworks Red Book is scheduled to be reviewed and published in 2023.

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| Actions | ML to circulate proposed 2023 meeting dates to the group | ML (Jan 2023) |
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