

Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG)

Meeting minutes – Tuesday 5th September 2023

Steering Group meeting (ENA Offices/MS Teams)

ATTENDEES

Name	Initials	Company
Bryan Woods	BW	Amey
Jo-Anne Michael	JM	HSE
Conor McMillan	CM	BT Openreach
Andrew Pinkham	AP	United Living
Jim Denholm	JD	SPEN
Richard Broome	RB	LSBUD
Laura Knight	LK	LSBUD
Paul West	PW	UKPN
Simon Kruyswijk	SK	Virgin/O2
Billy McCann	BM	Cadent Gas
Dave Benson	DB	Mott McDonald
Mike Leppard	ML	ENA

APOLOGIES

Name	Initials	Company
Eddie Eaves	EE	Highways England
Julia Evans	JE	Highways England
Steve Welsh	SW	SGN
David Burgess	DB	Network Rail
Matthew Hopkinson	MH	National Grid
Greg McGinn	GM	BT Openreach
David Foster	DF	Network Plus
Aaron Eaton	AE	UKPN
Iain Boardman	IB	Costain
Lee Cartwright	LC	Costain
George Foulger	GF	Clancy Group
Brett Stinton	BS	Northumbrian Water

MEETING NOTES AND ACTIONS

1. Welcome & Introductions

ML welcomed members to the Q3 2023 Utility Strike Avoidance Group (USAG) meeting, which was held as a hybrid meeting. The amended agenda was approved and will feature presentations from Mott McDonald and Cadent Gas.

New and returning colleagues were welcomed to the group including PW (UKPN) attending for Aaron Eaton, and CM (BT Openreach) attending for Greg McGinn. Apologies were noted as above but there also a number of no responses to the meeting invite. Some key contacts have also moved on from the group for whom replacements were unavailable or are still to be secured. ML will follow up with individual companies and contacts as required to ensure optimum membership of the Steering Group.

<u>Regulatory engagement</u>		
<p>BW reported that HSE had visited sites to audit the provision of welfare facilities for operational activities. This is a separate but relevant issue for excavations and had led Amey to review and consider what constitutes 'reasonable' provision given the variability in access, location, work activity, and client provision at different sites. Whilst there are established requirements within the CDM Regulations, JM highlighted a new Operational Guidance Note that has been issued to HSE Inspectors and this will be circulated to the group for reference.</p>		
Actions	<p>ML will follow up with individual companies and contacts to ensure optimum membership of the Steering Group</p> <p>HSE Operational Guidance Note on welfare standards will be circulated to the group for reference</p>	<p>ML (Ongoing)</p> <p>JM (Sept 2023)</p>

2. Meeting minutes – 5th July 2023

Accuracy

A few minor amendments had been made to the draft minutes, and the revised version circulated with the meeting papers. There were no other changes required and the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

Ongoing actions

There are by nature a number of ongoing actions relating to communications work, USAG projects, and industry initiatives. The slides from the last meeting on communications/web site development had been circulated with the meeting papers. The Streetworks UK guidance revision work is on the agenda for discussion, and similarly an update on the Streetworks UK excavated spoil project will be provided in the meeting.

Section 3 – Communications

The relevant page on the new USAG web site has been updated with the minutes from the Steering Group meetings. The July 2023 minutes will need to be replaced given the minor amendments made to the draft version.

A separate request had been received relating to BPAUS 09 module on Toolkit page of the web site; this relates to the policy process for managing utility services encased in concrete. ML and JD to follow up with David Gerrard (LSBUD) to confirm the accuracy of the current document and any update required.

Section 4 – Amey case study

BW had presented an Amey case study at the last meeting on a gas mains incident, and the slides were circulated to the group for noting. BW to liaise offline with BM on learning points for Amey and Cadent Gas from this event.

Section 5 – Pot ended cables

A discussion on the issues relating to the detection and excavation around pot ended cables had illustrated the difficulties in positively identifying their location from surveying methods given the absence of a signal in the cable termination. Members were keen to determine whether a common approach could be adopted by DNOs for records and the provision of information. Whilst all cables should be treated as live and approved excavation practices employed, non-earthed pot ended cables represent a higher risk and are often undetectable.

ML will forward the detailed radio detection advice to JD, and an invite will be extended to an Operational Safety lead from SPEN to attend a future meeting to discuss. ML will also seek further advice from the other DNOs through ENA.

Section 5 – Work underneath overhead lines

Information from both SPEN and ENA (TS 43-8 guidance) was forwarded to BT Openreach to assist with development of their company procedures.

Section 6 - National Damage Prevention Day

A summary report of the event had been issued by LSBUD and was circulated with the meeting papers; this represents good practice follow up and helps maintain awareness and momentum.

Actions	<p>BPAUS 09 module to be reviewed for currency and any update required</p> <p>An invite will be extended to an Operational Safety lead from SPEN to attend a future meeting on pot ended cables</p>	<p>ML/JD (Ongoing)</p> <p>ML/JD (Dec 2023)</p>
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3. Strike avoidance presentation

DB (Mott McDonald Bentley) provided a presentation on Service Avoidance Working Groups (SAWG) as a contractor of Severn Trent Water. The company is primarily engaged on mains renewal, diversions, repair and maintenance, and clean wastewater treatment work. The groups were set up in 2015 and are comprised of Tier 1 and Tier 2 contractors working on behalf of and reporting to Severn Trent. Since their formation strike incidents have reduced and there has been a great deal of work on improving communications and sharing of best practice.

The focus of the SAWGs has been on training and competence, incident investigation, sharing of knowledge, equipment, PPE, and safe systems of work issues as follows:

Training & Competence - EUSR Category 1 and 2 modules, Cat & Genny assessments, Data downloads and review;

Incident Investigation – Application of USAG Damage Form, Severn Trent incident data review;

Sharing Knowledge – Monthly meetings to review incidents and best practice, presentations, data analysis, shared lead of SAWGs;

Equipment – Cable avoidance tools, novel digging and excavation equipment;

PPE – Arc retardant clothing;

SSOW – Application of PAS 128 principles, Cat & Genny permits, RAMS;

Challenges over the last few years have been on the location of unchartered services, routes to improving quality of and access to data and utility maps, interpreting trends in data, and implementing lessons learned from incidents.

The following discussion raised a number of other common issues faced by businesses. These include routes to addressing and training in safety behaviours, means of translating national and company side messaging at a regional and local basis, routes to improving operator competency, and the approach to utility location (depth and frequency of scanning equipment). The challenge to USAG and companies is how to implement the group’s overarching objectives to secure improved liaison with USAG members and other safety groups, how best to share learning and best practice, and routes to engaging with hard to reach companies (SMEs, subcontractors). The presentation slides and supporting information will be circulated to the group.

Actions		
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4. Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

Communications

The new USAG web site was launched following the last meeting. The existing content is retained but is now more clearly displayed and accessible. LSBUD are now managing its maintenance and the USAG Infoline e-mail account building on the work of Pelican Corp colleagues.

LK reported that a number of specific issues were being addressed or needed support from USAG members. Links within members' web sites will help increase the number of searches and boost its prominence within search engines (Google etc.) Promotion of the web site will also be improved through member company communications contacts, and members were encouraged to provide comms team details.

There have been a number of new organisations and individuals visiting the site, and six new Charter sign ups. New routes of engaging and promoting Linked In and other social media tools will be explored, but as ever there remains a need for new material, case studies, information etc. from members.

Campaigns and Events

The CECA Safe Digging initiative is being supported by USAG members; following a northern region event a seminar/workshop is planned to be held in Gloucester in October including a tour of a Construction Training School. AP will forward details and the Eventbrite invitation when available.

Post meeting note: this event is now confirmed for Tuesday 14th November in Cinderford, near Gloucester.

ML outlined details of an ENA Public Safety workshop which is scheduled to be held in Birmingham on 21st September and cover issues associated with both excavations and work near overhead lines. The programme is complete, and the event had been widely publicised but take up to date outside of the DNOs is low.

Post meeting note: the event has now been postponed to April 2024 to encourage greater attendance and allow for more promotion; the plan is to retain the existing programme and speakers where possible.

Actions	<p>Promotion of the web site will also be improved through member company communications contacts, and members were encouraged to provide comms team details.</p> <p>A CECA seminar/workshop on Safe Digging is planned to be held in Gloucester; details and an Eventbrite invitation will be circulated when available</p>	<p>All (Ongoing)</p> <p>AP (October 0223)</p>
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5. Streetworks UK (SWUK) guidance

MC (Cadent Gas) joined the meeting to provide an update on progress with the review of SWUK guidance (Volume 1: Positioning and Colour Coding of Underground Apparatus). This one of six SWUK publications which were formerly NJUG documents, with Volume 2 covering housing developments. Volume 1 is now ten years old and needs to be reviewed, and MC is chairing the working group (comprised of utility asset owners) overseeing this revision.

The aim is to review the challenges of working in public highways, and Volumes 1 and 2 have now been amalgamated into one document. The scope of the content has been extended, and a number of issues addressed including legal and technical updates, developments in working practices, incorporation of scenarios, inclusion of district heating and heat network systems, and reference to marker systems much of which is set out a new appendix. Once complete, the new document will be included in the NRSWA training and accreditation process.

The next stage is for a public consultation on the new guidance; this is expected to be launched at the end of September and be kept open for a month for comments. MC outlined that responses can be from either individual organisations or collective submissions on behalf of groups such as USAG, and both routes are invited to secure as much feedback as possible. In the meantime, the slides from the presentation will be circulated to the group, and MC will forward the SWUK consultation link when available.

Actions	The slides from the SWUK presentation will be circulated to the group, and MC will forward the consultation link when available for organisations to respond	MC/ML (October 2023)
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6. USAG objectives

Previous discussions over the last year have focussed on governance issues and Steering Group (SG) members expectations, leading to a draft framework document setting out the requirements for the Chair and SG members. Follow up discussions with individual colleagues reiterated the need to enhance the effectiveness of the SG, re-establish previous smaller Working Groups, and determine the means to communicate and engage with the wider USAG membership.

Working Groups and topic leads have either focussed on, or continue to progress outside of the SG, on specific topics including Stike Data (RB), Communications (Pelican Corp, LSBUD), BPAUS Toolkit (JD, ML), and Training & Competency (AP). Over time these have produced a number of key outputs but now need to be redefined and supported.

The objective now is to progress the following areas:

- Determine specific work topics to focus on;
- Expand the scope and detail of the USAG SG work;
- Engage the wider USAG membership;
- Establish WGs (chaired by SG members) to meet outside of the SG.

This approach will need the governance arrangements to be revisited, refreshed, and agreed. The aim will be to define what is required from the SG and WG members, and establish those who have the time, experience, and skills to devote to this work which by nature remains a voluntary commitment. This should be accompanied by a degree of accountability on individuals and WGs to set out and deliver agreed work plans which can be reported into and monitored by the SG. Therefore, the USAG Business plan and individual WG Terms of Reference and programmes of work will need to be reviewed/set up.

The SG then discussed the process by which this could be achieved. Aside from the governance issues, the entire USAG membership needs to be communicated with above and beyond the existing communications and web site tools. This will provide greater access to and transparency of the SG. It was agreed the aim should be to work towards holding a USAG membership webinar using existing company contacts once the SG, WG, and objectives framework have been established. To progress this AP and ML will first revisit the governance arrangements and develop a proposed WG structure to present to the SG. A dedicated SG call will then be held to discuss and agree the approach and way forward.

Actions	<p>AP and ML to revisit the governance arrangements and develop a proposed WG structure to present to the SG to engage the USAG membership</p> <p>A dedicated SG call to be held to discuss and agree the approach and way forward (USAG webinar)</p>	<p>AP/ML (Nov 2023)</p> <p>All (Dec 2023)</p>
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7. Industry updates

Utility plans

RB raised an issue relating to the provision of utility plans. LSBUD policy, as per most of the asset owners, is to provide plans free of charge to assist with safe excavation work. However, some companies do make a charge in certain circumstances (e.g. conveyancing service requests), and one member recently charged a non-statutory undertaker for plans as the latter was not conducting work on their behalf. The legal requirement is for plans to be 'accessible' and there may be security related issues in some circumstances, but this could set a concerning precedent and, if practised more widely, could lead to an increase in risk through companies breaking ground without plans to avoid incurring any additional costs.

Asset owners present in the meeting confirmed they provide utility plans free of charge, but it was agreed a request will be issued to all SG asset owners to determine the extent of any issue here.

USP Competency Framework

Dave McPherson (DM, Kier highways) had introduced a new framework for robust competency management at the National Damage Prevention Day in June, and several members were both familiar with this programme and had engaged DM to discuss further. A paper outlining the concept and principles of the framework had been issued with the meeting papers for consideration.

AP provided further detail on the work; the content of the training modules has already been developed, and pilot trials are planned with some organisations to assess their use and effectiveness as part of a broader approach to competency management. It was suggested that DM be invited to present and discuss the framework at the next meeting; AP to invite and arrange. This will help set out and explain the process and the modules and links to existing competency models.

Streetworks UK (SWUK)

An update on the excavated spoil project was provided and a SWUK webinar for members is scheduled for 8th September; any presentation slides will be circulated with the meeting minutes. The focus at present is on modifications to RPS 211 for both waste producers and waste disposal sites following expiry of the original RPS in April, and on which ENA will consult in due course. It is expected that the volumes of allowable non-hazardous waste will increase to 15m³, and that further definition of unplanned works will be provided.

Parallel to this work, the risk assessment process for desk and site based assessments is being developed. These will support the revised Protocol and continued sampling required to demonstrate proof of concept. A number of separate issues need to be considered to support the above. This includes the potential use of rapid site on site testing, work with contractors, and budgetary issues for sampling and lab testing. The latter is required to prove site assessments are providing an accurate classification. An Environment Agency set timeline of 12-18 months is expected before full introduction of any new industry classification and testing process.

<p>Actions</p>	<p>A request will be issued to all USAG SG asset owners to determine any utility plan charging arrangements</p> <p>DM will be invited to present and discuss the USP Competency Framework at the next meeting; AP to invite and arrange</p> <p>A SWUK webinar on excavated spoil is scheduled for 8th September; any presentation slides will be circulated with the meeting minutes</p>	<p>ML (Next meeting)</p> <p>AP (Next meeting)</p> <p>ML (Ongoing)</p>
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8. USAG Meetings 2023		
<p><u>Meeting date</u></p> <p>The Q4 2023 meeting date is scheduled for Thursday 7th December and will be held at the ENA offices in London. A calendar invite will be issued in due course and a Teams link will also be provided as required.</p> <p><u>AOB</u></p> <p>JM informed colleagues that she will be stepping down from the SG as she is shortly moving on from HSE. A request has already been submitted for a new HSE contact. Everyone thanked JM for her input and contributions and wished her success in her new endeavours. JM provided an update on current HSE activity; as part of the promotion of occupational health, a Constriction Dust campaign is in hand, and this will be followed by a focus on materials handling to support organisations' planning of work issues. A CONIAC safety workshop on vibration is also planned for 4th October. All of the above events and other relevant HSE information on Working Well Together and welfare guidance will be circulated to the SG.</p>		
Actions	Information on all relevant HSE events and campaigns and other supporting information on Working Well Together and welfare guidance will be circulated to the SG	JM (Sept 2023)