

Overhead Cable Snagged by Digger

Version 1.0

Context

FAME H&S Notices are real-world examples of incidents, provided anonymously by FAME members, that highlight learning opportunities for the sector to improve our health and safety working. However, they are not designed to replace existing guidance.

The Incident

Whilst a digger was moving between trenches on a brownfield site it snagged a cable that had not been identified on the utility drawing and left it sagging.

The site had a number of services identified both underground and overground. Goal posts were in use in some areas. A communication cable between buildings was overlooked. When the client had walked the site with the archaeologist, he did not draw attention to this cable.

The digger was being banked by the archaeologist and neither they nor the driver saw the cable until contact was made. The digger arm was higher because a fence panel was being transported.



Key Take Aways

- Archaeologists should aim to identify evidence for any services not on the utility plan as early as possible after arrival on site. This requires a full visual inspection of the whole site.
- For sites of recent industrial use or known to be 'busy' with utilities a pre-start meeting should be considered.
- Clients should be asked specifically and proactively about services that may not be on utility plans such as onsite data/comms cables.
- The plant marshal should visually survey the area/route both on the ground and above head before the digger starts a transit under their control.
- Avoid carrying items on the digger when traversing under overhead lines.
- All staff should be briefed to report cables without goalposts or without equivalent controls.

Resources

HSE (United Kingdom) resources on overhead power lines but applicable to all overhead cables:

Overhead power lines

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/information/overhead.htm>

Avoiding danger from overhead power lines

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/gs6.pdf>

Working near power lines and cables

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/treework/safety-topics/power-lines.htm>

HSA (Republic of Ireland) Code of Practice for Avoiding Danger from Overhead Electricity Lines

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/publications_and_forms/publications/codes_of_practice/code_of_practice_for_avoiding_danger_from_overhead_electricity_lines.html