

Incident description:

During the construction of a protection slab for a highway tie-in on the A160/180 Improvement Scheme a block of concrete was uncovered. On investigation this proved to be protection for an 18cm diameter (approximate) bitumen-coated steel pipe which was then exposed at two locations 70m apart. The pipe did not appear as a live service on any of the utilities drawings and no evidence could be found that it was a redundant service.

In order to progress the work a process began to identify the owner of the service which involved asking utility companies to visit site to help with its identification. The utilities consultant employed on the project was in regular discussions with the site team regarding the information received.

Before the owner of the pipe had been identified an incident occurred with the pipe being tapped using Tek screws in two locations to prove whether the pipe was under pressure. This proved the pipe was not pressurised but left the line in a potentially dangerous state until it was formally identified as disused by National Grid Gas.

Investigation/findings:

- Existing procedures required the construction team to stop if uncharted services were located. This was not followed.
- The existing procedures did not explicitly detail steps to be taken after stopping works in order to identify the utility service owner or action to take if the utility service owner could not be located.
- At no time did the existing procedures or any member of the construction team suggest that tapping the service was an appropriate course of action.

Actions:

If an uncharted service is found:

- Stop work immediately in the affected area and contact all known stakeholders and utility providers.
- Protect the area around the service to ensure no unauthorised access.
- Make all efforts to identify the service by contacting and inviting to site any potential owners.
- If the service is damaged or the integrity breached in any way, ensure this information is passed to the interested parties. This will include service providers, stakeholders and emergency services under certain circumstances.
- Do not attempt any work on the service which might impair its integrity. This would include mechanical exposure or any other action which might damage the service.
- A safe system of work must be developed to carry out any diversion, removal or protection works which may be deemed necessary.