

# Underground Utilities toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Underground Utilities.

Working near underground services can pose a significant hazard to workers, public bypasses, and the business. The main services to be aware of are:

- Water pipes
- Gas pipes
- Electricity cables
- Telecommunication cables

## Why run this toolbox:

- Prevent unnecessary injury from working near underground services by improving awareness and training
- Assist with the understanding of legislative aspects and standards
- Fewer injuries means higher productivity

Buried services are widespread and it should be assumed that they are present until it is proved otherwise

Obtain all the underground service plans AND contact service provider if applicable.

Inspect for any above the ground indicators of services and other hazards

Mark out ALL services

Use Cable and Pipe Locating Devices

Ensure Emergency Information is available on site.

In conjunction with location devices and plans, potholes dug by careful hand excavation are essential before any excavation is commenced. Hand digging must continue until all of the services have been found.

- Pothole to confirm the position of services
- Use insulated spades and shovels.
- “Crow bars” and long metal bars should not be used. Tools should not be thrown or spiked into the ground.
- Horizontal digging is recommended as the force applied to hand tools can be controlled more effectively
- If there is any doubt as to where the service is located, stop work and consult with the service owner.

### **Can it be Hydro Excavated? This is a safer option.**

If not practicable, mechanical excavation can be carried out carefully and follow recognised safe digging practice and apply the Minimum Approach Distances (MAD).

- Mechanical Digging / Power tools cannot be used within MAD distances if services are not visually identified.
- Every effort should be made to excavate alongside the service rather than directly above it.
- Use trained spotter, establish communication type.
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Ensure safe access/egress to excavation is provided at all times.

Protect public from any open excavations.

## **If you hit a service:**

Stop works, make area safe, and notify manager and relevant authorities/service provider. Isolate if possible and organise repair.

## **Key takeaways:**

- Get plans and mark out services
- Use Cable and Pipe Locating Devices
- Pothole to identify services, and use of insulated tools.
- Hand digging within MAD distances
- Assume ALL services are LIVE, until proven.

[See all our toolbox talk topics here](#)

## **Contact us**

US 512 846-3011

AU 02 5104 6116

NZ 09 886 3309

EU +44 20 7193 9657

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