

**Excavation Near Underground Services (Potholing)**

Business Name:		ABN:
Business Address:		
Contact Person:	Phone:	Email:

**THIS RISK ASSESSMENT IS APPROVED BY THE PCBU ON THIS PROJECT**

Under the Work Health and Safety Regulation (WHS Regulation), a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) is required to ensure that a RISK ASSESSMENT is prepared before the proposed work starts.

Full Name:		
Signature:	Title:	Date:

**CLIENT OR PRINCIPAL CONTRACTOR DETAILS**

Client:	SCOPE OF WORKS
Project Name:	
Project Address:	
Project Manager:	
Contact Phone:	
Date Risk Assessment supplied to Project Manager:	



RISK MATRIX																																	
LIKELIHOOD	INSIGNIFICANT	MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR	CATASTROPHIC	SCORE	ACTION	HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS																									
ALMOST CERTAIN	3 HIGH	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE			<b>Elimination</b> Remove the hazard.																									
LIKELY	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE	4A ACUTE	DO NOT PROCEED	<b>Substitution</b> Replace the hazard.																									
POSSIBLE	1 LOW	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE	3H HIGH	Review before work starts.	Isolation Isolate People from the hazard																									
UNLIKELY	1 LOW	1 LOW	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	2M MODERATE	Ensure control measures in place.	<b>Engineering</b> Isolate the hazard																									
RARE	1 LOW	1 LOW	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	3 HIGH	1L LOW	Monitor and keep records.	<b>Administrative</b> Change																									
<b>Risk Rating &amp; Required Action:</b> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>4A</b></td> <td>Stop work. The risk is intolerable. Eliminate the hazard or redesign the activity before proceeding. A Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) or higher-level authorisation is required.</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>3H</b></td> <td>Review and approve additional controls before task starts. Senior supervisor sign-off needed.</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>2M</b></td> <td>Ensure all nominated controls are in place and effective. Proceed with caution; monitor conditions.</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>1L</b></td> <td>Proceed, following standard operating procedures. Monitor and keep records.</td> </tr> </table>								<b>4A</b>	Stop work. The risk is intolerable. Eliminate the hazard or redesign the activity before proceeding. A Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) or higher-level authorisation is required.	<b>3H</b>	Review and approve additional controls before task starts. Senior supervisor sign-off needed.	<b>2M</b>	Ensure all nominated controls are in place and effective. Proceed with caution; monitor conditions.	<b>1L</b>	Proceed, following standard operating procedures. Monitor and keep records.	<b>Notes on Hierarchy of Controls:</b> Remember to apply controls in the preferred order shown by the coloured pyramid: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eliminate</li> <li>2. Substitute</li> <li>3. Isolate</li> <li>4. Engineering</li> <li>5. Administrative</li> <li>6. PPE</li> </ol>																	
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1. Planning, Design and Scope Definition for Works Near Underground Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate consideration of underground services during early design and planning stages</li> <li>Scope of works not clearly defining locations, depths and tolerances around known utilities</li> <li>Failure to allow sufficient space and clearances from existing assets in the design</li> <li>Inadequate consultation with utility owners and asset managers before finalising design</li> <li>Lack of contingency planning for design changes if unexpected underground services are discovered</li> <li>Insufficient time allowed in the program for safe potholing, survey and service proving activities</li> <li>Failure to consider alternative construction methods that reduce need for excavation near services</li> <li>Inadequate planning for works within easements, corridors or congested utility zones</li> </ul>	4A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a formal design risk management process that specifically addresses underground services and excavation interfaces in accordance with WHS 2011 duties of designers</li> <li>Require all design documentation to show known and assumed locations of underground services with accuracy classes and confidence levels clearly indicated</li> <li>Include mandatory design reviews for projects involving excavation near services, with participation by WHS, construction and asset owner representatives</li> <li>Develop and apply a planning procedure that requires confirmation of service locations and clearances prior to finalising methodology and program</li> <li>Make feasibility assessments to consider lower-risk alternatives (e.g. rerouting, trenchless technology, relocation of proposed alignment) where services congestion is high</li> <li>Establish a change management process so that any design or scope variation triggers reassessment of underground service classes and risk controls</li> <li>Include explicit program allowances for service proving, potholing, survey validation and potential redesign if unexpected services or objects are encountered</li> <li>Ensure tender and contract documentation clearly states responsibilities, hold points and data requirements relating to underground service management</li> </ul>	3H
2. Underground Service Information Gathering and Verification Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to request accurate and current utility plans from all relevant service providers</li> <li>Reliance on outdated, incomplete or poor-quality as-constructed information</li> <li>No standard process to consolidate, review and validate service information from multiple sources</li> <li>Service plans not geo-referenced or not compatible with project survey datum, leading to location errors</li> <li>Lack of procedure to deal with conflicting service information between drawings and field observations</li> </ul>	4A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a corporate procedure requiring mandatory Dial Before You Dig / Before You Dig Australia enquiries and direct engagement with asset owners before any excavation planning</li> <li>Establish a standard process to obtain, log and review underground utility information including age of plans, accuracy statements and conditions of use</li> <li>Use GIS or centralised digital mapping systems to consolidate all utility and asset information over the project area, aligned to the project survey control</li> <li>Introduce a formal verification workflow where utility plans are cross-checked against recent aerial imagery, topographic survey and historical records</li> <li>Develop a decision tree for managing uncertain or conflicting records, including conservative protection zones and compulsory service proving by potholing or locating</li> <li>Require that assumptions on unknown or unconfirmed services are recorded in a risk register and communicated to field supervisors and subcontractors</li> <li>Implement an information management system where all service-proving results, including photos and survey data, are uploaded and referenced to as-built drawings</li> </ul>	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inadequate documentation of assumed service locations where information gaps exist</li> <li>No formal system for updating records after new services are installed or modified</li> <li>Failure to capture and store potholing and service-proofing results for future reference</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandate periodic review and update of underground service records on long-duration projects to capture any network changes or new connections in the vicinity</li> </ul>	
3. Service Locating, Survey and Potholing Verification Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of unqualified or inexperienced service locators leading to mis-located utilities</li> <li>No formal standard for selection, calibration and operation of locating equipment (GPR, EM, etc.)</li> <li>Inconsistent survey methods resulting in inaccurate depth and position records of exposed services</li> <li>Inadequate procedure governing when and how many verification potholes are required</li> <li>Failure to verify all critical crossings or intersection points with potholing before major excavation</li> <li>Poor documentation of pothole positions, depths and service identifications</li> <li>Service proving activities not integrated into the construction program, leading to rushed or incomplete verification</li> <li>No process to validate locator results in complex or treed landscapes where signal quality is compromised</li> </ul>	4A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a competency and prequalification standard for service locators, requiring recognised training, certification and demonstrated experience</li> <li>Develop and enforce corporate guideline on approved locating technologies, calibration intervals and operating procedures for underground service detection</li> <li>Mandate survey by qualified surveyors of all critical located and potholed services, capturing three-dimensional coordinates and as-found depths</li> <li>Create a risk-based potholing strategy that defines minimum verification requirements near high-risk utilities (e.g. high-pressure gas, HV electricity, major fibre backbones)</li> <li>Implement hold points in the construction schedule so that bulk excavation cannot proceed until specified service potholes have been completed and signed off</li> <li>Standardise documentation templates for recording pothole results, including GPS coordinates, photos, service type, material and protective coverings</li> <li>Introduce quality assurance checks where a sample of located services is independently verified or cross-checked by a secondary method (e.g. GPR vs EM)</li> <li>Require specific additional validation controls for treed landscapes and congested corridors, such as supplementary hand-digging and repeated scans from different orientations</li> </ul>	2M
4. Asset Owner Consultation, Permits and Isolation Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to obtain required permits or approvals to excavate near particular utility assets</li> <li>Lack of clarity around ownership, control and technical requirements for different underground services</li> </ul>	3H	<div style="background-color: black; height: 15px; width: 100%;"></div> <div style="background-color: black; height: 15px; width: 100%;"></div>	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor coordination of isolation, shut-down or pressure reduction arrangements with utility operators</li> <li>Permits that do not adequately describe the work area, methodology and separation distances</li> <li>Misunderstandings between principal contractor and asset owner regarding monitoring, standby personnel or supervision needs</li> <li>Inadequate communication of permit conditions to supervisors and workers on site</li> <li>No system to verify that permit conditions and isolations remain valid throughout the work</li> <li>Inability to quickly contact asset owners in an emergency due to incomplete or outdated contact information</li> </ul>		<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	
5. Excavation Method Selection and Plant Management Near Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of inappropriate excavation methods too close to vulnerable services (e.g. mechanical augers, breakers, trenchers)</li> <li>No standard exclusion distance for plant and attachments working near verified or suspected services</li> <li>Failure to control drill rigs or boring equipment to prevent drilling subsurface utilities</li> <li>Inadequate system for limiting excavation depth and direction when working above or alongside services</li> <li>Poor change management when switching from potholing to bulk excavation methods</li> <li>Lack of assessment for vibration, ground movement or collapse risk impacting adjacent buried assets</li> <li>Uncontrolled use of high-pressure water or air that may damage protective coatings or conduits</li> </ul>	4A	<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No process for approving specialised plant (e.g. vacuum trucks) and ensuring they are fit for purpose</li> </ul>		[REDACTED]	
6. Competency, Training and Authorisation for Work Near Underground Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervisors and workers lacking specific training in underground service identification and control measures</li> <li>No competency criteria for personnel directing excavation near critical utilities</li> <li>Inadequate understanding of the consequences of striking particular service types (e.g. gas, HV, fibre optics, water)</li> <li>Subcontractors engaged without verification of training and experience in service strike prevention</li> <li>Failure to train personnel in recognition of non-obvious signs of buried infrastructure in treed or landscaped areas</li> <li>No refresher training regime leading to skill fade over time</li> <li>Workers unaware of procedures for dealing with unexpected buried objects or artefacts</li> <li>Lack of clear authorisation for who can approve excavation advance closer to identified services</li> </ul>	3H	[REDACTED]	2M
7. Site Establishment, Mark-Out and Physical Protection of Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inaccurate or incomplete ground mark-out of underground utility locations and no-go zones</li> <li>Service markers removed, disturbed or not maintained as excavation progresses</li> <li>Lack of physical barriers, edge protection or covers to protect exposed assets during works</li> <li>Poor distinction between different service types in line marking and flag systems</li> </ul>	3H	[REDACTED]	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to account for future excavation stages when establishing initial exclusions and barricades</li> <li>• Inadequate protection of services in public or high-traffic areas, increasing risk of vehicle or plant impact</li> <li>• Inconsistent handover of mark-out information between shifts or separate crews</li> <li>• Temporary works and stockpiles encroaching into service protection corridors</li> </ul>		[REDACTED]	
8. Supervision, Spotting and Work Coordination Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient supervision for complex excavation near multiple underground services</li> <li>• Spotters used without clear role definition, training or authority to stop work</li> <li>• Multiple contractors working simultaneously in the same service corridor without coordination</li> <li>• Poor communication between plant operators, spotters and supervisors during critical excavation passes</li> <li>• Supervisors responsible for many work fronts to effectively oversee service protection</li> <li>• Failure to adjust supervision levels when conditions change (e.g. discovering additional services, reduced visibility, night works)</li> <li>• Spotters distracted with other tasks or not provided with appropriate vantage points</li> <li>• Language barriers or cultural issues affecting clear communication of directions and warnings</li> </ul>	3H	[REDACTED]	2M
9. Management of Unexpected Finds, Buried Objects and Cultural Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal procedure for dealing with unexpected buried objects, voids, unknown services or artefacts</li> </ul>	3H	[REDACTED]	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workers continuing excavation after discovering unexpected items due to production pressure</li> <li>Disturbance of heritage artefacts, human remains or culturally sensitive material</li> <li>Failure to recognise non-utility objects that may still present hazards (e.g. unexploded ordnance, contaminated soils, old tanks)</li> <li>Inadequate notification and escalation pathways when unexpected services or objects are found</li> <li>Poor coordination with regulators, heritage authorities or asset owners following discoveries</li> <li>Lack of documentation of unexpected finds leading to repeat exposure for future works</li> <li>Uncontrolled backfilling or covering finds that may be needed for investigation</li> </ul>		<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	
10. Environmental and Ground Stability Risk Management Around Buried Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ground instability or collapse of excavations impacting adjacent underground services</li> <li>Water ingress, flooding or erosion undermining service bedding or supports</li> <li>Tree roots and vegetation removal affecting support for nearby buried pipework or conduits</li> <li>Disturbance of contaminated soils or asbestos-containing material around existing services</li> <li>Settlement or heave of ground after excavation and backfilling causing service stress or damage</li> <li>Inadequate design and control of dewatering systems, leading to movement of ground around utilities</li> </ul>	3H	<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to consider loadings from plant, stockpiles or traffic above shallow services</li> <li>Poor reinstatement around services, reducing long-term protection and increasing likelihood of future failures</li> </ul>		[REDACTED]	
11. Emergency Preparedness, Incident Response and Utility Strike Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of a documented emergency response plan for utility strikes (gas, electricity, water, communications)</li> <li>Workers unaware of immediate actions required following a suspected strike or leak</li> <li>Inadequate provision or maintenance of emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers, spill kits and first aid supplies</li> <li>Delays in contacting emergency services or asset owners during an incident</li> <li>Poor control of site evacuation and exclusion zones in the event of a gas escape or electrical fault</li> <li>Incident investigations that do not identify root cause and systemic failures related to service strikes</li> <li>Failure to notify regulators and duty holders in accordance with WHS notification requirements</li> <li>Learning from incidents and near misses not systematically shared across projects</li> </ul>	3H	[REDACTED]	2M
12. Contractor, Subcontractor and Designer Management for Underground Service Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selection of contractors without adequate experience or systems for managing underground service risks</li> <li>Designers not engaged during construction to address clashes or unexpected conditions</li> <li>Inconsistent risk standards between principal contractor and subcontractors working in the same area</li> </ul>	3H	[REDACTED]	2M

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor integration of service management requirements into contracts, scopes and deliverables</li> <li>• Limited oversight of subcontractor compliance with locating, potholing and permit procedures</li> <li>• Reliance on lowest-cost providers for critical functions such as service locating or vacuum excavation</li> <li>• No requirement for designers to consider construction methods and excavation constraints around existing services</li> <li>• Inadequate close-out of contractor performance issues relating to underground service protection</li> </ul>		<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	
13. Communication, Consultation and Information Sharing with Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers not informed about locations of underground services or changes to service information</li> <li>• Limited worker input into identifying local underground service risks and practical controls</li> <li>• Inadequate toolbox talks or pre-start meetings focused on production rather than risk controls</li> <li>• Information on service locations and control measures not readily accessible at the work face</li> <li>• Language and literacy barriers preventing workers from understanding plans, permits and procedures</li> <li>• Shift changes and rotating crews leading to inconsistent awareness of current service risks</li> <li>• No mechanisms for workers to raise concerns about service-related risks without fear of reprisal</li> <li>• Lessons from previous projects or earlier stages not communicated to new crews or subcontractors</li> </ul>	3H	<p>[REDACTED]</p>	1L

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14. Documentation, Records and Continuous Improvement of Underground Service Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incomplete or poorly controlled documentation of underground service management activities</li> <li>• Loss of critical records such as permits, potholing logs, as-built plans and incident reports</li> <li>• Difficulty retrieving information for future works, leading to repeat exposure to known risks</li> <li>• No systematic review of effectiveness of underground services risk controls across projects</li> <li>• Failure to update corporate procedures and standards following incidents or regulatory changes</li> <li>• Inconsistent record-keeping practices between projects and business units</li> <li>• Insufficient management review of leading indicators such as near misses and verification failures</li> <li>• Non-compliance with legislative or client requirements for retention of safety and asset records</li> </ul>	3H	<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	1L

SAMPLE

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE – CALL 000 FOR EMERGENCIES**

Ensure to have an Emergency Management Plan in place as well as adequate numbers of trained first aid staff with easy access to fully stocked first aid kits, rescue equipment, material safety data sheets, adequate access to emergency communication equipment and fire-fighting equipment suitable for all classes of fire and ignition sources.

**LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES**

RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND CODES OF PRACTICE. DELETE THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES FOR ANY STATE THAT ARE NOT APPLICABLE

**Queensland & Australian Capital Territory**

Work Health and Safety Act 2011  
 Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011  
 Legislation QLD: <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/work-health-and-safety-laws>  
 Codes of Practice QLD: <https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice>  
 Legislation ACT: <https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/acts-and-regulations>  
 Codes of Practice ACT: <https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice>

**Victoria**

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004  
 Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017  
 Legislation VIC: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/occupational-health-and-safety-act-and-regulations>  
 Codes of Practice VIC: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/compliance-codes-and-codes-practice>

**New South Wales**

Work Health and Safety Act 2011  
 Work Health and Safety Regulations 2025  
 Legislation NSW: <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/legal-obligations/legislation>  
 Codes of Practice NSW: <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/list-codes-of-practice>

**Western Australia**

Work Health and Safety Act 2020  
 Work Health and Safety Regulations 2022  
 Legislation Western Australia: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/legislation>  
 Codes of Practice WA: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/codes-practice>

**Northern Territory**

Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011  
 Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulation 2011  
 Legislation NT: <https://worksafe.nt.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/workplace-safety-laws>  
 Codes of Practice NT: <https://worksafe.nt.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice>

**Safe Work Australia Links**

Law and Regulation (All States): <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/law-and-regulation>  
 Model Codes of Practice: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/resources-publications/model-codes-of-practice>

**South Australia**

Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)  
 Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA)  
 Legislation for SA: <https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/resources/legislation>  
 Codes of Practice for SA: <https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/workplaces/codes-of-practice#COPs>

**Model Codes of Practice**

- Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work
- Confined spaces
- Labelling of workplace hazardous chemicals
- Managing risks of hazardous chemicals in the workplace
- Welding processes
- First aid in the workplace
- Managing the risk of falls at workplaces
- Hazardous manual tasks
- Managing the risk of falls in housing construction
- Managing electrical risks in the workplace
- Demolition work
- Excavation work
- Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination
- Managing the work environment and facilities
- How to manage work health and safety risks
- Managing risks of plant in the workplace
- Construction work

**Tasmania**

Work Health and Safety Act 2012  
 Work Health and Safety (Transitional and Consequential Provisions) Act 2012  
 Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012  
 Work Health and Safety (Transitional) Regulations 2012  
 Legislation for TAS: <https://worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/laws-and-compliance/acts-and-regulations>  
 Codes of Practice for TAS: <https://worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice>

Details of permits, licenses or access required by regulatory bodies (add or delete as required):

- Permits from local council
- Authorisation to commence work
- Any required documents.