



Trench collapse

Issued to: **All Network Rail line managers, safety professionals and accredited contractors**

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Location: Eastbourne, Sussex route, Southern region

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Overview

On 12 August 2022 trench excavation works were being undertaken within the highway to a depth of 1.60m. The excavation required a temporary works design and a proprietary system was being used for areas where operatives needed to access the trench.

The temporary works were to be used at locations where operatives needed to enter the trench to join the new ducting being installed. Two teams of five members of staff were employed to undertake the task of excavation, shoring, placing of ducting and backfilling of trench.

Trench support was installed by a minimum of two people from the top of the trench and then a ladder placed within for access. Areas between the shoring was left open and no people were required to enter this space.

Two people were left in the working area to install trench support. They entered the trench within the shoring that had been installed.

Rather than come out of the trench to install the next set of temporary trench shoring, one person walked along the unsupported trench to the required location to install the trench support in an unplanned manner from within the trench. Clay from the side of the trench came loose and struck the operative on the right hip causing bruising.

Discussion Points

- Why would the operatives decide to undertake the trench shoring activity in a manner that was not briefed and not safe?
- If more staff were needed to undertake the task why did they not stop works, inform the supervisor or state the 'worksafe procedure'?
- Why did the staff assess the open excavation as safe when their task was to install trench shoring to stop collapse – we all have a different perception of risk.
- Consider what impact the hot weather may have, it is known to be a factor with the clay side wall drying out when excavations are left for some time.