



National Joint Utilities Group

CASE STUDY NUMBER 87: Balfour Beatty / South West Water Delivery Alliance: Sight Specific Initiative

WINNER OF THE NJUG SAFETY AWARD 2016

The National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) is the UK industry association representing utilities solely on street works issues. NJUG represents some 56 utility companies and contractors engaged in the street works sector, and 18 specialist sub-contractors who provide equipment, materials and services supporting street works activities. Our members represent major contributors to economic growth and work to deliver gas, electricity, water and telecommunications to both individual consumers and UK plc. In order to continue this drive for further improvements within the industry - we have developed the NJUG Vision for Street Works, which revolves around seven main principles:

- Safety
- Avoid Damage to Underground Assets
- Sustainable Methods and Materials
- High Quality
- Minimise Disruption
- Keep the Public Fully Informed
- Innovation

This case study is an example of the street works sector delivering on these principles and turning the vision into reality.

Overview

A joint initiative between the South West Water Delivery Alliance, H₅O and WESC (Specialist Centre for Visual Impairment) going beyond existing best practice and industry standards by engaging directly with the blind and visually impaired to learn their concerns and difficulties, and identify how the industry can make a difference ensuring utility street works are a safer place for everyone.



Case Study

After the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) representative delivered a presentation to an October 2015 Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) Conference, H₅O believed more could be done to educate employees on how it feels to be a visually impaired person encountering street works. H₅O approached WESC (Specialist Centre for Visual Impairment) to support the initiative and worked with two representatives to design and implement an interactive training session.



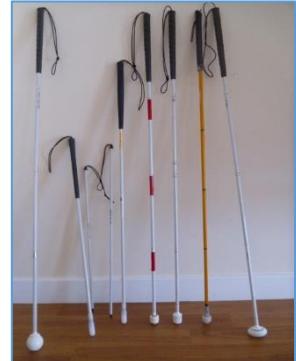
The New Road and Street Works Act's (NRSWA) 'Safety at Street Works and Road Works' Code of Practice' states that '*You must take into account the needs of children, older people and disabled people, having particular regard for visually impaired people*'. However, although there are an estimated two million blind or partially sighted people in the UK only 175,000 of these are easily identifiable via guide dogs or canes, which can lead to complacency or a perception that the risk is low.



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This initiative, attended by over 1,000 representatives, sought to educate the teams on how to identify the different types of canes used to represent different disabilities, advice on correct guiding techniques, and how it might feel to be visually impaired in an unfamiliar environment. This programme highlighted how negotiating street works can be for somebody who is usually impaired, what steps that can be taken to minimise the impact of street works including keeping sites tidy. The experience resulted in a reinforced sense of sympathy and understanding for the challenges they face, and how even the simplest of measures can have a big difference.

The content of the Sight Specific training programme is relevant and engaging going beyond existing best practice by engaging directly with those people affected to learn their concerns and difficulties. H₅O worked closely with WESC to create a programme where participants not only learnt but experienced, at first-hand, what it might feel like to be visually impaired. The programme's content has already been adopted by others working on the highway including Thames Water, Balfour Beatty's GDSP contract (West Midlands) and Balfour Beatty Living Places (Yorkshire), and was chosen to be on the South West HAUC Roadshow Agenda in March 2016.



Mobility Specialists from WESC gave advice as to how to approach a visually impaired or blind person to offer help and tips on correct guiding techniques. During the interactive sessions, participants analysed the use of barriers, ramps, footpath diversion routes including hazard identification such as low tree branches from their perspective. They also learnt about the different types of canes and what they signify (for example, a red and white striped cane means the pedestrian is deaf blind), and were encouraged to try on 'simulation spectacles' illustrating different types of vision loss, as well as learning the importance of the Three A's – Approach, Ask and Assist. Participants then practised their new guiding techniques on colleagues wearing sleep shades attempting to negotiate a street works site.



Jenny, a visually impaired participant being interviewed on the DVD

Benefits

The main benefit of this initiative has been to make it easier for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to negotiate H₅O worksites and educating staff to take their needs into consideration. Based on feedback, this programme has evoked emotion and galvanised changes in attitudes, enabling personnel to think differently about how sites should be set up, and thus making those sites much safer for everyone.

Working with a local organisation such as WESC made this a real community initiative and joint effort – this was the first time that WESC had worked with a utility company. The initiative has been communicated and utilised by other companies – far surpassing earlier expectations by being replicated nationally. The initial local initiative involving 100 attendees has evolved to a UK-wide initiative to over 1,000 people, resulting in winning the Water Industry Award and being shortlisted at the Construction News Awards.

Since the presentation, monthly audits have shown a 50% increase in observations highlighting the attention to detail for signing, lighting and guarding across H₅O, and at the time of writing there has not been a single accident or incident involving members of the public at any of our sites, having submitted 2879 street works notices over this period.