

MEDIA RELEASE (for immediate release)

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Underground utility service strikes a ‘ticking timebomb’ that only a comprehensive digital data system can defuse

A ticking timebomb underneath Australia’s roads and footpaths will claim lives and cause costly disruptions to communities without urgent reforms and cross-sector collaboration.

That’s the warning from Before You Dig Australia (BYDA), which says preventable damage to buried power, water and telecommunications assets from excavation activities by numerous industries and occupations can only be fixed by tightening national data capture, compliance and sharing standards.

More than **15,000** underground utility strikes occur each year in Australia, costing the national economy **\$4.6 billion** through project delays, service disruption and productivity loss; exposing workers and communities to serious risk.

“The next fatality or outage will not be a surprise. It will be a choice,” BYDA CEO Mell Greenall said.

“The footpaths and roads that Australians walk, cycle and drive on hide a chaotic mess of cables, pipes and services that we all rely on every day for our internet, electricity, heating and water supply.

“On average, there are at least 41 preventable utility strikes every day, one every 20 minutes in daylight hours, with the vast majority in metropolitan Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane – **and these are the ones we know about.**

“Collectively, they cost billions of dollars and one day they will cost lives, not to mention substantial disruption to our homes and businesses, our cities, towns and suburbs, just like [the 2022 outage that impacted the entire state of Tasmania](#) and shut down flights, banks and businesses.”

Digital utility data standards are ‘the solution’

BYDA this week began piloting a secure digital utility portal in select areas covering Brisbane’s Olympics infrastructure, western Sydney and Perth. A proof-of-concept of the portal last year attracted participation from more than 1,000 industry stakeholders and demonstrated productivity gains alone amounting to **\$330 million annually.**

Backed by tier one telco and energy companies, the digital utility portal has the potential to revolutionise productivity and safety with significant cost savings across all consumer utility services but only if every utility asset owner and local authority are supported to share quality underground asset data.

Development of the portal was prompted by BYDA research that examines why utility strikes persist and consistently identifies practical reforms – including a national mandate - that governments can implement to significantly improve safety, infrastructure resilience, and project productivity.

“The problem in Australia is systemic rather than behavioural. While responsibility for preventing strikes often sits with frontline workers, the power to improve underlying conditions rests with governments, regulators, and asset owners,” Ms Greenall said.

“What we’re talking about is a 40-year-old system in a high-risk digital age. It is a fragmented information ecosystem that remains largely static and document-based, yet one with consequences for all.

“However, improving the quality and accessibility of underground asset data, including minimum standards and digital data sharing can **save \$782 million a year.**”

Other reforms BYDA is calling for include using national data insights to support regulators, enabling targeted enforcement, education, and industry improvement initiatives, consistency of legislation – including mandatory BYDA enquiries before all excavation works - that can **save \$322 million p.a.**

“These reforms involve strengthening the legal and regulatory environment rather building a new system so the existing ecosystem can operate effectively.

“This is an immediate opportunity for government leadership, to enable a system – a single source of truth - that can save billions of dollars and reduce risk,” Ms Greenall said.

For further information, case studies or requests to interview BYDA CEO Mell Greenall, contact:

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About Before You Dig Australia

BYDA is a not-for-profit, industry-led organisation that operates Australia’s national “before you dig” referral service. Each year we facilitate more than 2.7 million requests for underground utility information from contractors, engineers, councils and the public.

Our role is to connect those planning excavation with the asset owners responsible for critical infrastructure to prevent damage, disruption and injury. Read our latest research report [here](#).

Case study: [Real-world portal test demonstrates safety and productivity benefits of using digital utility data](#)