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Accelerated housing supply reforms risk increasing costly utility excavation damage events without consistent safeguards

The Federal Government's rush to fast-track housing supply will increase the risk of costly utility infrastructure strikes without appropriate safeguards, Before You Dig Australia (BYDA) warns.

As the national pre-excavation referral service, BYDA is urging the Commonwealth Government to introduce measures to ensure the necessary enabling infrastructure for housing developments is delivered without doubling or tripling the \$4.6 billion annual cost of utility strikes.

"Housing plans and infrastructure plans need to work together. Not only can poor coordination of both add months or years to projects but they can significantly blow out costs," BYDA CEO Mell Greenall said.

"The government's rush to build more homes will by necessity be matched by a rising volume of excavation work near existing underground infrastructure.

"Without uniform guardrails nationwide, the risk of costly, avoidable and potentially deadly strikes against community power, water and telecommunication services will get worse if appropriate guidelines are not in place."

In a submission to the Productivity Commission's Housing Supply Regulation report now being finalised for the Government, BYDA recommends excavation damage to existing buried infrastructure **is expressly recognised as a material risk and cost.**

Further reforms recommended include:

- A **national, legislated mandatory pre-excavation enquiry duty;**
- Nationally consistent minimum data standards for underground utility asset information to reduce **strike risk and planning uncertainty for developers;** and
- The development of a national data and reporting framework for excavation damage and utility-strike casualties, to **fill a current and significant evidence gap.**

"Across the Government's housing delivery, economic and productivity agendas, underground utility strikes remain an unaddressed cost of the very reform directions the Productivity Commission has prioritised.

“The consequences of damage events to critical infrastructure are very real and include significant service disruptions, delays and substantial cost blowouts on construction projects as well as the potential for injuries and fatalities.

“The urgency to build more homes is understandable and the Government will not want to see an erosion of public confidence in its ability to deliver its housing agenda.

“As soon as excavation damage is recognised as an unaddressed cost and a serious, material risk to critical national infrastructure, the more effective the government will be in achieving its housing objectives,” Ms Greenall said.

Click to [view or download Before You Dig Australia’s submission](#) to the Productivity Commission’s Housing Supply Regulation inquiry.

For further information, case studies, or interview requests, contact:

Simon Mossman

Head of Insight, Research and Advocacy

Before You Dig Australia

0417 064 104

simon.mossman@byda.com.au

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](#).