



# Communication Counts

*Failing to notify the proper personnel before making a repair can have dangerous consequences*

BY PHIL KIMBLE

When we think of communication cables, we typically think of the cables buried underground that carry television, Internet and phone service. These same cables are also buried under water spanning rivers, bays, and oceans. Underwater communication cables connect cities, countries and even continents.

For deep-water projects, the cable is deployed from a vessel with a large reel. The weight of the cable takes it to the ocean floor. For shallow-water projects, where damage to the cable from boating and fishing activities as well as shifting bottom conditions is anticipated, the cable must be buried. Since the 1970s, cable burial by plowing has been recognized as the only truly effective method for protecting communication cables from these hazards.

Initially, sled-type cable plows dug a trench into which the cable was set. Today, water-jet assisted plows can lay more cable per hour while reducing the size of the vessel needed to pull the plow, thus lowering costs. Either electric motor-driven pumps attached directly to the sled or portable diesel-powered pumps on board the tow vessel supply water to the jets.

Working on a vessel laying cable can be boring and tedious. With the vessel moving at no more than three miles per hour, there is not much more to do than watch the cable slowly slip

beneath the water surface—until something goes wrong.

On one such vessel, the onboard water pump began leaking at the outlet connection. Upon discovering the problem, a crew member decided to take matters into his own hands. Without notifying the captain of the condition or his intentions, the crew member decided he could fix the leak without interrupting the cable laying operation. Because the pump was operating at only 90 psi, he thought it would be quick and easy. All he had to do was tighten the clamp bolts.

When the crew member started to pull on the wrench to tighten the first bolt, the hose whipped off of the pump, striking him in the chest. The blow threw him several feet through the air into the crane that is used to deploy and retrieve the plow sled. He slumped to the deck unconscious.

What the crew member failed to notice when he went to make his repair was that the clamp was slightly askew on the fitting. Because the clamp was under pressure, the additional stress caused by moving the bolt was all that was necessary to cause it to release its grip on the coupling. Let's "Keep It Safe" by notifying proper personnel that a problem exists and making repairs only when it is deemed safe to do so. Never attempt any repair when a system is pressurized. Doing so can carry deadly consequences. ■