Subsea (submarine) cables have been laid on the seabed since the eighteen fifties. Cables installed since 1983 have been buried at the time of installation, with a target burial depth of 0.8 metres. Unfortunately there remains the possibility, in places, of the cable not being buried or becoming unburied. It is not possible to show these areas, thus the entire cable route should be treated with the utmost caution.

The vessels most at risk are those with towed gear, bottom and beam trawls and dredges. Static gear, whilst not entirely free from risk, is less likely to be affected.

In the event of becoming entangled with the cable there is a high probability of damage to or loss of fishing gear as well as fishing time and catch. If attempts are made to lift the cable to the surface or to pull the gear free there is the very real risk of loss of stability eventually leading to capsize with resultant loss of life.

Submarine Cables and the Risk of Snagging

Cable Awareness & Emergency Procedures

Please keep clear and do not damage submarine power cables. You risk the loss of your gear and catch, and power supplies can be disrupted. These cables carry extremely high voltages and can be dangerous to life. It is an offence to wilfully damage submarine cables.

The coasts of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Europe have a large number of submarine cable systems. When fishing gear fouls a cable the results can be expensive and dangerous. Many cables have high breaking strains, some over 70 tonnes.

If gear is caught in these you may cause damage to nets and lines as well as

If you suspect that you have fouled a submarine power cable the following action should be taken:
1. If weights are excessive and you suspect you are fast to a cable, DO NOT endanger your vessel and crew by attempting to recover your gear.
2. Carefully plot your ships position as accurately as possible.
3. Advise your Coastguard station of your situation or call the 24 hour Emergency Number and state that an incident is occurring concerning an underwater Submarine Power Cable.

Contact Details

24hr Emergency Contact Numbers - BritNed Control Room
Tel: +44 (0)1634 273080 or +44 (0)800 0481569

Always ensure you have the latest Kingfisher Information onboard your vessel - www.kingfishercharts.org

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The heaviest form of armoured cable has 70 tons breaking strength. (1.72 inches), with the insulation, galvanised reinforcement and steel wires making up the overall cable diameter.

The weight of the cable in air is 44.2 kg/m and 33.1 kg/m in water. The heaviest form of armoured cable has 70 tons breaking strength.

If a cable is broken by fishing, anchoring or other seabed activities it will be repaired. The damaged section is recovered to the surface and a new section spliced in. This spliced area represents a risk to fishermen, there will be slack cable on the seabed equal to approximately twice the water depth and post repair burial is not as effective as installation burial.

The closer to the surface a power cable is lifted when fouled by fishing gear, the more danger there is to the fishing vessel. If it is thought prudent to slip or cut one of both warps or bridle’s in an attempt to clear a cable from the fishing gear, always lower the gear to the seabed first. Never attempt to slip anything bearing excessive weight.

Useful Contacts

Marine Management Organisation
Lowersoft
Tel: +44 (0)1502 573149, Email: lowersoft@marineorganisation.org.uk

Harwich
Tel: +44 (0)1255 508973, Email: harwich@marineorganisation.org.uk

Hastings
Tel: +44 (0)1424 24109, Email: hastings@marineorganisation.org.uk

The National Federation Of Fishermen’s Organisations
Tel: +44 (0)1904 635430, Email: nffo@nffo.org.uk, Web: www.nffo.org.uk