IN THE TRENCHES

Fiber optics is coming to our neighbourhood! This is great news for those of us who have come to rely so much on the internet. It gets us connected to the modern world and allows us tremendous flexibility. With this excitement, I still couldn't help noticing an archaic practice that seems to have stayed with us even as we become more technically advanced.

Trenches waiting for the arrival of Fiber Optic Cable

The cable is installed underground. That makes sense; it stays out of harm's way there.

The part that worried me was the timing of the trench digging. It took about three days to dig a few kilometres of trenches into the pavements. That was a month ago. Since then the trenches have been standing idle waiting for the cable to be laid. And from what I have seen, trenches are typically dug four to six weeks before the cable is laid.

Of course, one might argue that the trenches are sure to be ready so that the cable can be laid as soon as it arrives. But really, a month to six weeks before the cable arrives seems a bit over the top.

There are significant disadvantages to having the trench standing open for all that time:

- The longer the trench stands open, the higher the danger of somebody being injured; the barriers are not designed to physically stop somebody from falling in
- Pedestrians are forced off the pavement onto a very busy road and run the risk of being knocked over by a motor vehicle
- The chances of damage to present cables and pipes and vandalism increase with time

And what about the operational waste incurred:

- Unnecessary Work-in-process: The trench with its associated costs does not add any value as it stands

- Excess Inventory: All the poles and barrier cloth is tied up for weeks, and thus can't be used anywhere else
- Process waste: One has to wonder why such a large trench has to be dug for such a small diameter cable, and why it has to be so deep. It may be that we want to have it in the same place as other cables and pipes. With the detection equipment that is now available, this should not present a problem.

It is hard to believe that in this day and age we can't find a way to shorten the time between the digging, laying and refilling operations and reduce all that waste in the process.

Why is that? Is it because we have little faith in our planning and coordinating ability? Or is it because we have always done it this way? Whichever it is, there is definitely room to reduce a substantial amount of waste and risk in this process.

Click here to visit our website.