

Fatality Narrative

Laborer Falls into Trench and Struck by Excavator Bucket*

Industry: Site preparation contractors.
Occupation: Laborer.
Task: Taking measurements of trench.
Type of Incident: Machinery/Struck by.

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On August 20, 2007, a laborer died after falling into a trench and being struck by an excavator bucket. The 28-year-old victim had been working for about five months with a site preparation contractor. The victim was working with a crew digging a trench for a new sewer system. He was helping the excavator operator by taking trench depth and length measurements with a tape measure. They had just finished exchanging information about measurements when the operator told the victim he was going to take another bucket of dirt away from near the victim. The operator began lowering the bucket when the victim stepped toward the bucket, slipped and fell seven feet to the trench bottom. The victim may have been trying to ride the bucket. The operator made an emergency stop of the bucket and boom, causing the bucket to bounce and pin the victim against the trench wall. The victim died of blunt force injuries to his chest and abdomen.

Incident scene showing excavator and trench.



Requirements/Recommendations (! Indicates items required by code)

- ! Train employees to recognize and avoid unsafe conditions and to follow required safe work practices that apply to their work environment.
- Before each work shift begins, review and confirm communications signals between machine operators and workers on foot.
- Do not permit workers on foot to approach the hydraulic excavator or backhoe loader until they signal the operator to shut down the machine and receive acknowledgment from the operator.
- Keep workers outside the hydraulic excavator swing areas (danger zone) and clear of attachments.
- Keep non-essential workers away from moving equipment.
- Equipment operators need to be aware of worker locations within site and maintain visual contact with persons who are working near the swing radius of the equipment.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 59th out of 80 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2007, and was the 13th out of 16 construction-related fatalities.

**This bulletin was developed at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State. The information in this notice is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.*

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