



Alaska FACE Facts

Occupational Injury Prevention Program
Section of Epidemiology
Division of Public Health
Department of Health and Social Services

January 1999

Apprentice Lineman Caught in Trencher

A 26-year-old apprentice lineman was killed when he was caught in a trencher. The apprentice (the victim) was removing a small berm by shoveling it back into a partially dug trench. The incident was not witnessed. It was surmised that either the victim lost his balance and fell toward the active machinery or the digging chain caught his clothing and pulled him into the trench. An electrical engineer and an inspector (the witnesses) standing at the opposite end of the trench noticed a rapid movement and something bright thrown in the air (the victim's hard hat) near the trencher. They immediately called to the operator. The trencher was stopped and moved away from the trench. Co-workers went into the 16" x 60" trench to locate the victim as one of the witnesses called on his cellular phone for emergency assistance. The victim was located and pronounced dead at the scene.

Based on the findings of the investigation, to prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

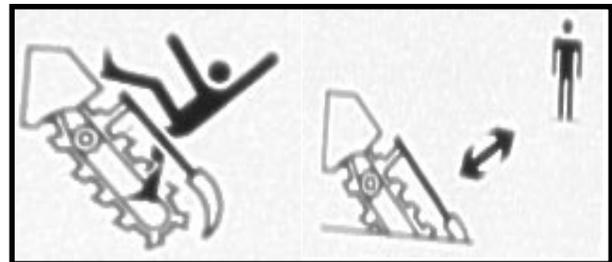
- **Ensure trenchers are equipped and used with appropriate attachment(s) to reduce potential hazards to workers;**
- **Ensure that a job safety analysis has been performed on all work-related tasks.**
- **Ensure workers maintain a minimum 10-foot safety zone around an active digging chain and conform to all safe work practices for machines.**

In this incident, workers entered the trench and went under the digging chain to locate the victim. Although this was an emergency situation, rescuers should never place themselves in a hazardous situation to render aid (rescue

fever). Workers should never be allowed under raised equipment unless supported by hoist or blocks. If the equipment or attachment cannot be supported, it should be moved away.

Additionally, owners of early model trenching equipment should:

- **Consider installing safety placards that illustrate dangers associated with an active trencher.**



For more information or a copy of this FACE report, contact the Occupational Injury Prevention Office (907) 269-8000 or visit our website

<http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/programs/injury>

