

Toolbox Talks 2

044: Unsafe Acts: Trenching

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review any company policies related to trenching.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts when transporting, fueling, maintaining, and using trenching equipment.

Discussion notes:

Background

Trenching equipment is in wide use for several reasons. One reason is it replaces the backbreaking labor of digging with a spade. But back injuries and other injuries are also possible with a trencher. So are other dangers.

Some unsafe acts with trenchers

- Starting the job site without the phone numbers of the local gas and electric utilities and the means to phone them.
- Manhandling a trencher onto or off the trailer. Trencher manufacturers provide dollies or other means for rolling small trenchers on and off of trailers. Large trenchers are typically self-powered, and can be driven off (rather than rolled off by hand).
- Trenching without proper marking from a buried line survey. Gas, power, and communication lines may be in shallow soil. Utilities have programs for identifying what's under the surface.
- Going outside existing survey markings. Typically, the buried lines are marked with spray paint and flags (or other markers). The boundaries of the surveyed area should also be marked. If you don't know the boundaries of the surveyed area, ask.
- Adding fuel when a trencher is hot. It may be hot from use or from being in the sun. Pouring gasoline onto a hot surface is just asking for a fire. Fuel the trencher at the start of the shift before using it. If you break for lunch, leave the trencher in the shade and fuel it again before using it.
- Talking to people when operating the trencher. Make it clear by your actions that you can work or you can talk, but you can't do both at the same time.
- Walking a trencher up a hill. If you must trench on a hill, trench in the down-hill direction (assuming you are behind the trencher).
- Reaching into the business end of a trencher to remove a tree root or other object. Instead, set the trencher controls to "off." This may be as simple as turning the ignition key. Then, use a tool to pry loose the stuck object or pull it out. Never use your fingers to grab something stuck in the trencher screw/blades.

If something went wrong with the survey

- If you cut a buried cable, stop. Turn the trencher off. Look where your feet are, before stepping away from the trencher. Call the utility immediately.
- If you hit a gas pipe, stop. Turn the trencher off, and move away from the pipe. Call the gas company immediately.

Review and discussion

1. Why should you have the phone numbers of the utilities before you start trenching?

2. Where can you find information on the proper way to move a trencher onto or off of a trailer? *[Note to presenter: This information is in the Operations Manual or Owner's Manual. But this question raises another point. Only qualified personnel should operate a trencher. This means only someone who has been trained in its use and is authorized by the company to operate it. Someone who has been trained in the use of a particular trencher will be familiar with the means of loading and unloading it from a truck or trailer.]*

3. Why is a buried line survey important?

4. What are some cautions, in regard to the buried line survey?

5. When is it unsafe to add fuel to a trencher?

6. If someone insists on talking to you while you are operating the trencher, what should you do? Why?

7. The trench route involves a stretch that runs uphill. How can you trench uphill safely? *[Note to presenter: You simply start at the other end, and trench downhill, instead. This assumes the trencher you are using has the operator walking behind it.]*

8. If a trencher jams up because a piece of buried metal strapping gets snarled in the blades, how should you remove that strapping?

9. What should you do if you hit a buried cable?

10. What should you do if you hit a buried gas pipe?

Participant's Signature and Date

[illegible]