Trenching Safety Fatality File



2 Workers Escaped Trench Collapse but Ordered Back In: 1 Died, 1 Injured

Two workers who escaped a trench collapse were ordered back into the trench, which later caved in, killing one and injuring the other, according to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The contractor faces proposed penalties of $243,406.

The incident occurred October 23 in Austin, Texas, when workers for D Guerra Construction LLC were installing a residential sewer line. The 13-foot-deep trench did not have cave-in protection, OSHA says.

The deceased worker, who was not identified, died of suffocation and crushing injuries, according to OSHA online records.

“Despite a partial trench collapse earlier in the day, D Guerra Construction LLC recklessly sent employees back into the excavation without protective measures to prevent another cave-in,” said OSHA Area Director Casey Perkins in Austin. “The loss of this worker’s life was preventable, and the employer must be held responsible for ignoring excavation safety rules.”

OSHA issued citations April 21 for the following violations:

- No protective system in place in the trench. Willful violation; $130,524 proposed penalty.
- A competent person as designated by OSHA guidelines had not performed an inspection of the trench before workers entered it. Willful; $93,234 proposed penalty.
- Employees did not receive training on hazards associated with working in and around the trench. Serious violation; $9,324 proposed penalty.
- Water was in the bottom of the trench. Serious violation; $9,324 proposed penalty.
- The contractor did not report to OSHA within 24 hours of the injury that a worker was hospitalized. Other-than-serious violation; $1,000 proposed penalty.