

Jobsite Safety

By Scott Berry

In the last issue I took a somewhat tongue-in-cheek look at the very serious issue of job site safety. In my career in the water industry I have had some very near misses that could have turned out much worse and it was a matter of luck that they came out as well as they did.

You remember Rick from the last issue? he was very nearly not around for us to enjoy his good natured acceptance of his misfortune. As I said in the last article, Rick works for a County Roads Department. One dark, foggy, stormy night he responded with the rest of his crew to a report that a culvert had washed out and opened up a hole in the centerline of a road. The road was typical for a rural coast road. Built on top of fill, several sections have settled over the years and as a result the road surface has many changes in vertical elevation. The trucks were parked behind a rise in the road with the headlights on high beams. The rise in the road between the trucks and the wash-out were casting a shadow from knee level down. The hole in the road was approximately six feet in diameter down eight feet to a churning cauldron of flood stage stream water flowing through a four foot culvert. The opening in the road was not marked by flares or cones yet and was obscured by the shadows coming from the truck headlights. Rick was walking over to talk to the crew Foreman who came in from the other direction when he disappeared into the abyss of the washout. He knew he was in trouble even before he hit the water and that allowed him to catch a breath. He landed feet first and immediately started swimming downstream. The culvert daylighted eighty feet away and thirty feet lower than the road surface in a large pool. The water was moving fast enough that it removed his laced up work boots and shirt before depositing him gasping and sputtering in the pool. He clambered breathlessly for the bank and looked up to see people running towards the hole with flashlights, ropes, and other supplies that may be needed. People were shouting and panicked thinking the worst and they could not hear Rick shouting to let them know where he was over the noise of the water and the idling equipment. He was finally able to crawl up to the road about the time they thought to look for him in the outfall.

This story thankfully has a happy ending. Rick is fine but it was too close. If there had been any kind of obstruction in the culvert he would not be around now. Every situation has its own set of circumstances to adapt to and figure a safe way of obviating. When showing up on a jobsite where an obvious hazard is present, post someone there to ensure no one else gets in trouble until the threat is minimized. There are many other instances I could site, some don't have happy endings but all have lessons to teach.

The prior example is covered in many OSHA regulations and Oregon statutes;

§1926.95 Criteria for Personal Protective Equipment.

(a) Application. Protective equipment, including personal protective equipment for eyes, face, head, and extremities, protective clothing, respiratory devices, and protective shields and barriers, shall be provided, used, and maintained in a sanitary and reliable condition wherever it is necessary by reason of hazards of processes or environment, chemical hazards, radiological hazards, or mechanical irritants encountered in a manner capable of causing injury or impairment in the function of any part of the body through absorption, inhalation or physical contact.

At the time Rick fell through the hole, there was no shielding or barriers in place.

§1926.106 Working Over or Near Water.

(a) Employees working over or near water, where the danger of drowning exists, shall be provided with U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket or buoyant work vests.

(b) Prior to and after each use, the buoyant work vests or life preservers shall be inspected for defects which would alter their strength or buoyancy. Defective units shall not be used.

(c) Ring buoys with at least 90 feet of line shall be provided and readily available for emergency rescue operations. Distance between ring buoys shall not exceed 200 feet.

(d) At least one lifesaving skiff shall be immediately available at locations where employees are working over or adjacent to water.

This regulation also applies to anyone working around treatment plants where the danger of drowning exists.

As I stated before, each incident provides a lesson learned. It's much easier and safer to learn the lessons prior to an event happening. For more information on jobsite safety, refer to the OSHA website at <http://www.osha.org> and follow the links to the specific category you are researching. I recommend spending some time going through all of the regulations pertinent to Standards – 29 CFR

as well as Oregon statutes pertaining to the Safe Employment Act at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/ors/654.html>. Public Utilities and construction usually tie with logging for the highest fatality rate of all job classifications. It's up to all of us to educate ourselves and see that we are not added to that statistical classification.

In addition to injury and loss of life, litigation stemming from unsafe conditions on a jobsite is a very real possibility. A person does not have to be employed at the jobsite in order to bring a claim against a responsible party. For example, pedestrians injured walking next to a construction site, those who are lawfully present at a site and those visiting a site may be covered under the law.