
Excavator operator drowns

This Alert is based on the WorkCover NSW Safety Alert *Operating earthmoving equipment in or near water*, published in January 2008.

Purpose

This alert highlights to employers and operators of mobile construction plant the dangers of working close to water and follows an incident in New South Wales where a man died after the excavator he was operating tipped over in a creek bed. The excavator landed on the cabin door and although fitted with 3 alternative emergency exits the operator was not able to escape.

Background

Operating powered mobile plant over or adjacent to water where there is a risk of drowning is high-risk construction work. As such the principal contractor and subcontractors should develop a safe work method statement [SWMS] for the job and ensure that a safe system of work is implemented and observed by all operators. Employers must ensure procedures are in place to deal rapidly with emergencies and that mobile plant has appropriate safety features (e.g. warning devices and emergency exits) fitted.

NOTE: After 1 July 2008, safe work method statement [SWMS] will be mandatory for this type of work in Victoria.

Recommendations

Prior to commencing work with powered mobile plant in or adjacent to bodies of water (e.g. pools, rivers, creeks and dams, etc) the employer should:

- Assess the stability of the work surface [e.g. creek bed, river bank or dam wall]
- Determine the depth of water along the expected work area
- Determine if water depth is effected by tidal flow and its impact on the work
- Identify unsafe areas [holes, rocks, steep banks, etc] which may effect plant stability
- Determine if it is possible to work from level areas, including temporary pads
- Devise and implement emergency procedures based on site conditions
- Select the most appropriate plant for the task and the site conditions
- Ensure all safety features and emergency exits on mobile plant are in working order
- Ensure all operators are instructed in and understand the safe system of work and emergency procedures
- Ensure that the safe system of work is implemented and adhered to on site

Further Information

General health and safety advice and WorkSafe publications are available on Worksafe's Website www.worksafe.vic.gov.au and can also be obtained from the WorkSafe Advisory Service by phone Toll-free 1800 136 089 or by emailing info@worksafe.vic.gov.au.

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