

Fatal Alert

On August 22, 2016, an employee was trying to locate a natural gas pipeline with a magnetic locator. The employee was unable to detect the tracer wire through direct connection to the wire with his locator. The employee began to dig up the tracer wire using a spade and sand spade shovel. Starting at the above ground stand the tracer wire was located. The employee dug a 3 foot 4 inch by 3 foot 6 inch hole approximately 4 feet deep. The ground he was digging in was saturated with water. The employee was laying down next to the hole with his left arm on the west side of the hole and his hips on the south side of the hole. The employee was reaching in the hole, trying to find the issue with the tracer wire with his right hand when the employee slipped, falling head first into the hole pinning his left hand behind his back. The employee was unable to self-extricate and drowned.

Significant Findings

- The employee was designated as a Competent Person for ground disturbance activities by his employer.
- The employee was working alone.
- The employee failed to recognize the water hazard associated with the excavation.

Recommendations

- Recommend the employer retrain all competent persons in excavation hazards.
- Identify the hazards of hand-dug excavations.
- Ensure all competent persons understand the dangers of water accumulation.