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CONSTRUCTION ACCIDENTS THAT ALMOST HAPPENED

Those of us in the safety profession spend a lot of time letting people know what causes accidents and how to avoid them.

Sometimes this involves sharing stories of accidents that happened-or almost happened-to others. Here are a couple of "near miss" events that could have been much more serious, or even involved a fatality.

As you read about these cases, analyze what went wrong and decide what you should do to avoid a similar exposure.

A Rigging Mishap:

This incident took place in a remote area of Alaska. A general contractor hired an electrical sub-contractor to bore under roadways, stream beds, and install construction conduit. Part of the agreement required the general to position the boring machine where these operations were to take place. This required winching a truck and trailer combination up a steep incline on an oil company right of way. The general contractor's crew delivered the truck and trailer, positioned it at the bottom of the right of way, and supplied the bulldozer and all rigging for the job. The lead person on the subcontractor's boring crew stayed in the truck as it was being winched up the incline. This particular incline was located adjacent to a cliff.

As the rig was being winched up the hill, the sling between the winch line and the truck parted, and the truck and trailer began freewheeling backwards toward the cliff. The truck driver decided to jack knife the trailer and jump clear of the vehicle in order to avoid going over the edge. The trailer was damaged as a result, but no personal injuries occurred. It could have been a disaster.

So, why did this happen? The sling selected for this application was too small to withstand the weight of the truck and trailer combination. Knowing the weight of the load is the first step. Selection of rigging which can withstand that weight--plus a significant safety factor--is

the next step. The third step is a thorough inspection of all rigging to assure it is in good working order. If these steps had been taken, the mishap could have been avoided.

An Overhead Danger:

Another incident happened to this same subcontractor on a different conduit construction project. The conduit, which is spooled off the truck and into the vault, is guided by rollers which prevent the wire from being damaged as it is pulled in. The heavy rollers hang on the side of the manhole and present no danger of being dislodged--usually.

On this job, wire for a section of conduit had been pulled in and a worker in the bottom of the vault was preparing it for terminations in the pad mounted transformer. Then, somehow, the roller became dislodged and fell approximately eight feet, glancing off the worker's hard hat and shoulder. He sustained minor injuries to his head and shoulder, but if he had not been wearing a hard hat, the accident would almost certainly have been fatal.

The reason construction workers should wear hard hats at all times was made obvious by this incident. If you become accustomed to going without one, you will often forget to put it on when it is needed. In the "near miss" case described, two things could have prevented this accident: (1) rollers could have been secured in place with rope, and (2) rollers could have been removed once the wire pulling operation was complete.

This is hindsight. Avoid accidents with foresight.