



Jim Persons
jimpersons@safetypride.com
707-889-0881

BACK HOE SAFETY

Back hoes are one of the most common types of construction equipment found today. And rightly so as their versatility and maneuverability make the backhoe the equipment of choice for most construction jobs. Backhoe loaders can dig, scrape, load material, lift and with specialized attachments do almost any required task.

No one should operate a backhoe unless specifically trained and authorized by the company. Backhoe operators are skilled professionals responsible for an expensive piece of equipment as well as the safety of those working on the project.

Backhoe operators need a few items for personal safety. Safety shoes, hard hat, safety glasses, heavy gloves, reflective clothing, hearing protection and quite possibly a respirator where necessary.

Backhoe loaders are complicated machines. Be sure to know your equipment's capabilities and limitations such as its load capacity, stability speed, braking and steering before operating the equipment.

Check to make sure you have an operator's manual before you use the equipment. Inspect your backhoe for protective devices. Are seat belts provided? Seat belts are required for back hoes or any equipment which has rollover protection. Inspect your lights, warning lights, and audible buzzer or signal to make sure they are working. Double check the instruments and controls. The operator maintenance inspection procedure is really very important before you operate the equipment. Breakdowns can be disastrous. You can get more dependability of the equipment if you take care of it and the first step is operator maintenance. Check the hydraulic system for leaks. Check all the fluid levels, oil, water, battery, transmission, and fuel. Check hoses and fittings for leaks or damage. Inspect the condition of the tires for proper pressure and any noticeable cuts or damage.

OK, the equipment is in good operating condition - you are ready to go. Use the handrail or steps when mounting the machine. Do not use the controls as handholds. Put your seat belt on snugly, set the controls in neutral or park with the parking brake on. Never start the backhoe from any position other than from the driver's seat. After the vehicle starts and warms up, check your brakes and other equipment to make sure it is functioning properly. One of the first safety rules we will discuss is riders. There are absolutely no riders on backhoe loader equipment.

When driving, slow speed is safe speed. Often 5 miles per hour is posted on the job site but use your good judgment and drive slowly for the conditions. There are always people walking around so take it slowly. Be aware that braking conditions may vary due to mud, loose gravel, or other conditions. There are always obstacles on the job such as rocks, stones, and debris. Soft soil conditions exist around edges and deep holes. When operating the loader be sure the backhoe is secured in the upright position and carry the loader bucket low, close to the ground. This allows maximum visibility and stability. Stay in gear when traveling downhill. Use the engine's RPM to help maintain control. Before beginning the backhoe digging process, lower the stabilizers so the wheels are off the ground leveling the unit. Check the boom swings to avoid hitting anyone or anything that may be in the boom path. Remember, you are permitted to operate the backhoe loader only from the driver's position. Never when you are on the ground. When operating on a slope, be sure the unit is level with the stabilizers.

Swing loads uphill to avoid a balance problem while on the slope and place soil well away from the edge of the trench. When loading dump trucks, the dump truck driver must be out of the cab and away from the process. Never swing a load over the cab. Prior to digging be sure all utilities have been located and pot-holed to make their location. Hitting a power line is extremely hazardous and costly. If you are not sure, check with your foreman before digging. Damage to water mains, telephone, or cable TV lines have a tendency to make headlines and headaches. If you must use a road or highway, be sure your slow-moving sign is in place and always hand or turn signals. Follow the rules of the road. If traffic gets backed up behind you, pull over and let them pass. Safety is important especially on construction projects with people performing their jobs, back hoes, dump trucks, just a lot of activity. Backhoe loaders are important pieces of equipment. They save time, money, and effort and make everyone's job easier. The people who operate this equipment are professionals and they do a great job. A short program on safety does not tell the whole story. The experience of the backhoe operators and their attention to safety on the job is what really counts.