

Safety and health alert

04/05 Fatal entanglement of drill operator in drill string

Incident

A self-employed drilling contractor was fatally injured when loose clothing became caught in the unguarded drill string of a truck-mounted drilling rig while he was drilling for water on a farm property. The initial point of entanglement appears to have been the right sleeve cuff of a loosely woven, woollen jumper. The contractor was working alone and there was no emergency stop mechanism within reach once the contractor became entangled.

Factors to consider

- Unguarded moving parts of plant, including drill strings and augers, represent a risk of entanglement.
- Persons who operate or pass in close proximity to unguarded moving parts of plant may be exposed to a risk of entanglement.
- Prominent, clearly marked and immediately accessible emergency stop buttons provide a means of stopping moving parts should a person become entangled.
- Wearing inappropriate (i.e. loose, unsuitable material) clothing may increase the risk of entanglement while working in close proximity to unguarded moving parts of plant.
- The risk of injury or harm may be increased when working alone due to difficulties contacting emergency services if required and/or having a lack of immediate assistance available in the event of an emergency.
- Safe systems of work include ensuring that there is a procedure for regular contact and a means of communication available when working alone.

Recommendations

1. Every dangerous part of plant, including drill strings and augers shall be, as far as is practicable, securely fenced or guarded.
2. Where it is not practicable to eliminate the risk of entanglement with guarding, persons shall not operate or pass within close proximity to the moving part.
3. Prominent, clearly marked and immediately accessible emergency stop buttons should be in place and regularly maintained to ensure efficient operation.
4. Inappropriate clothing (i.e. loose, unsuitable material) should not be worn while working in close proximity to any dangerous moving part of plant.
5. Employers and self-employed persons should ensure that wherever practicable, persons working with drilling equipment do not work alone so immediate assistance is available in the event of an emergency.
6. Employers and self-employed persons should ensure there is a means of communication available for isolated workers to enable the worker to call for assistance in the event of an emergency.
7. Employers and self-employed persons should ensure there is a procedure for regular contact in place for isolated workers and that the worker is trained in the procedure.

Further information

Further information on this summary can be obtained from WorkSafe's internet site at www.safetyline.wa.gov.au or by contacting Senior Inspector Peter J Omodei on (08) 9327 8777.

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