Forklift Backs Into Hidden Trench



An equipment operator working for a power company was killed when she backed a forklift into a trench covered with plywood.

The incident occurred at a company building that was being partly torn down to make way for a new highway. A storeroom in the building had been cleared, leaving three pallets of material staged outside the building. The victim was preparing to remove the material.

She arrived on site and asked a company construction co-ordinator about the pallets and a forklift. The co-ordinator, who was not aware of the trench, directed her to a forklift on the loading dock. Behind the forklift was a trench measuring about five feet wide and four feet deep (1.5 meters by 1.25 meters). This trench had been dug across the loading dock a few hours earlier and covered with large sheets of plywood. The victim walked through the building to the loading dock, crossing a barrier of yellow tape but not stepping on the plywood. She apparently did not realize that the plywood covered a trench as she backed the forklift across the loading dock. The lift truck broke through the plywood and fell backwards into the trench, crushing the victim when the impact bent the forklift’s cage support into the steering wheel.

Access to construction sites must be controlled to prevent fatalities such as this. Excavations must be guarded and marked, and excess equipment should be removed from the area before construction begins.