Operator Hits Gas Line



A heavy equipment operator was killed in an explosion when he hit a natural gas pipeline with a piece of heavy machinery. Four other workers were severely burned.

The operator was digging a drainage trench near a natural gas pipeline. An advisor from the gas pipeline company was on the scene to locate and stake two buried pipelines. He had staked one line, which he thought was the north line. Stakes were then placed at a certain distance from this line indicating what was supposed to be a safety margin for excavating. Actually, the line he located was the south line, and the safety stakes were placed right over the north line. The trencher operator took his assumption for fact and did not wait for the other line to be located and staked. However, the heavy equipment was actually working in the area of the pipeline, not in a safe zone. The equipment hit the line and an explosion occurred.

Both the trencher and the staker were well-trained and had a lot of experience in their jobs. They had worked together many times in the past.

Never start excavation until all utilities are identified and properly staked. And don’t operate on assumptions. When safety is involved, get all the facts. In this case, both workers were highly experienced, and had worked together often. No matter how much job experience your team has, you must continue to communicate clearly and carefully about hazards.