Underground Utility Strikes Fatality File



On June 16, 1995, a 28-year-old male municipal utility worker was electrocuted when a backhoe struck a 4,100 volt underground electrical transmission line.

A four-man crew was attempting to determine the source of a water leak in front of a private home and had dug a trench to examine the water lines. The victim was standing on the lawn and holding a shut off key that was attached to a water valve when the backhoe severed the electrical transmission cable.

The electrical current traveled from the transmission line, through standing water, to a copper pipe, to the metal shut-off key, electrocuting the victim.

The backhoe operator was not injured. NJDOH FACE investigators concluded that, in order to prevent similar incidents in the future, these safety guidelines should be followed:

- Employers should always call for utility company mark-outs before excavating near underground utility lines.
- Employers should ensure that heavy equipment operators are properly trained before using the machinery.
- Employers should ensure that employees are properly supervised at work sites.
- Employers should use non-conductive tools when excavating near utility lines.