

Safety Alert

January 2017



SPOTTER REVERSED INTO BY EXCAVATOR

Workers were finishing off a section of subsurface drainage with an excavator. One worker was acting as a spotter.

The excavator operator was reversing and concentrating on the traffic which was close to his left hand side separated by bollards, and he was aware the spotter was in the vicinity. The spotter moved into the excavator's blind spot which placed him in a vulnerable position.

At this moment one of the workers was yelling at the spotter to get out of the way as the excavator was getting close to him.

The spotter did not understand or hear what he was yelling due to plant noise, traffic noise and the noise of the reversing beeper of the excavator. The excavator operator was unaware the spotter had walked into his blind spot and continued to reverse, ultimately coming into contact with the spotter. The operator did not see him prior to contact.

The spotter sustained severe bruising and several fractures to his left ankle. The incident was reported to WorkSafe.

Contributing Factors

- Spotters for plant movement are a low level unreliable control;
- The spotter had placed himself in an unsafe position, in the 'blind spot' of the excavator;
- Background noise, traffic and other workers;
- The spotter did not communicate his location to the operator;
- The excavator operator should not have moved their machine if they were unaware of the spotter's location.

Lessons Learnt

Several near identical incidents have occurred over a period of years, the use of spotters is a low level control as demonstrated with the Hierarchy of Safety Controls. Higher level controls need to be implemented that are more reliable to ensure these incidents do not occur in future.

This incident also reinforces the need to make sure that all workers pay attention at all times to their surroundings and work that is or may be going on around them. You should never assume that others are aware of your presence.

Safety Alert 140 Issued 21/02/2017 by VicRoads Corporate Safety and Wellbeing Team.