Dream Buried Under Ton of Wet Dirt



Jose Vega, a 36-year-old construction worker, had a dream of one day reuniting with his little girl, a year after escaping Cuba in a boat. Vega had come to the United States to earn money to support relatives back in Cuba.

A ton of wet dirt dumped into an excavation hole robbed Vega of that dream and his life, near Vero Beach, FL, in mid-November. He was attempting to install a pressure device on a water line at a housing development when a backhoe operator, who hadn't seen Vega working inside, dropped dirt into the hole.

An Indian River County sheriff's department spokesman said Vega would not have been visible in the hole because of his bent-over position and the angle of the excavator. It wasn't until about 20 minutes later that Vega's coworkers noticed him missing and subsequently found him buried and lifeless.

An autopsy showed that Vega died of suffocation. The excavator operator was not charged in connection with the death, but OSHA is investigating.

Could this sort of tragedy occur in your workplace? Do you have some sort of warning system in place to prevent it from happening?