Excavations Fatality File



OSHA investigating trench collapse that killed 47-year-old man in Grain Valley

Investigators with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration are investigating the death of a 47-year-old Kingsville, Missouri, man in a trench collapse in Grain Valley Wednesday, a spokesperson said Thursday. The victim, whose name has not been released, was working for Preferred Plumbing Inc. of Kingsville. The company has no previous known OSHA history, Rhonda Burke, a spokesperson for the agency, said in an email. The worker was killed when the trench he was working in collapsed shortly before noon at a home under construction near Southwest Tisha Lane and Southwest Hillside Drive.

Rescuers with Central Jackson County Fire Protection District responded and after trying to free the man for 25 minutes, they transitioned from a rescue to a recovery effort.

The man’s body was pulled from the trench about 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, said Chip J. Portz, chief of community risk reduction for Central Jackson County Fire. According to the preliminary investigation, the worker was installing plumbing lines for homes under construction in a 10-foot deep trench when the collapse occurred, OSHA’s Burke said. The investigation will determine whether trench protective systems were being used as required. “Trenching standards require the use of protective systems in trenches deeper than 5 feet, and soil and other materials be kept at least 2 feet from the edge of trench,” Burke said. Serious injuries can occur when a trench collapses. One cubic yard of soil can weigh as much as a car — nearly 3,000 pounds — and can bury a worker in minutes. In 2020, 21 workers died in fatal trench collapses, according to industry reports. Because of the dangers, OSHA has a website dedicated to the trenching hazards and safety. OSHA has also partnered with the National Utility Contractors Association to raise awareness of OSHA safety standards. The agency also participates in Trench Safety Stand-Down Week each June to educate employers and workers about safety precautions.

OSHA has six months to complete its investigation, issue citations and propose monetary penalties if violations of safety procedures are found, Burke said.