Trenching and Irrigation — Landscaping Fatality File

Fatal Trenching and Irrigation Accident in Landscaping

On October 12, 2023, a fatal accident involving trenching for irrigation installation occurred in a residential landscaping project in Austin, Texas, resulting in the death of a 36-year-old worker, Kevin Harris. Harris was working in a trench approximately 8 feet deep, installing irrigation pipes, when the trench walls suddenly collapsed, burying him under tons of soil.

Despite the immediate efforts of his coworkers and the prompt arrival of emergency services, Harris was pronounced dead at the scene due to asphyxiation and severe trauma. The investigation revealed that the trench lacked proper protective systems such as shoring or trench boxes, which are essential to prevent cave-ins.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigation highlighted several critical safety violations, including the absence of protective systems in trenches deeper than 5 feet, inadequate inspection of the trench by a competent person, and failure to ensure proper egress from the trench. As a result of these findings, the landscaping company has been cited for multiple safety violations and faces significant penalties.

Following this incident, the landscaping company has implemented comprehensive safety protocols, including mandatory use of protective systems in all trenches deeper than 5 feet, daily inspections by a qualified individual, and rigorous training programs for all workers on trench safety and hazard recognition.