

# Slippery slopes

Stay aware of changing soil conditions when using a trencher

**The accident:** A crew was installing underground telecommunications cable when the trencher operator started to maneuver the trencher out of a ditch on the edge of roadway. The shoulder of the roadway gave way and caused the machine to roll toward the ditch. The man attempted to jump clear but the trencher rolled on top of him and pinned him underneath. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

**The bottom line:** Stay alert to changes in soil conditions when using a trencher. Stay in the operator's seat at all times when operating the machine and keep your seat belt fastened.

Watch for obstacles and go around rocks and stumps. Avoid crossing exposed railroad tracks, ditches, ridges or curbs. If the crossing cannot be avoided, reduce speed and cross at an angle. Avoid soft edges and surfaces, deep holes and steep grades.

Use extreme caution in working along the edge of high banks and steep slopes. Never operate the machine close to the edge of an overhang. The edges could collapse or slide could occur, causing severe injury or death.

Stay in gear when traveling downhill. Do not shift into neutral. Maintain adequate rpm to provide steer-



Illustration by Don Lomax

ing and braking functions. Use the same gear range for traveling down a grade as you would for traveling up a grade. Always use service brakes and parking brakes carefully and in accordance with the manufacturer's manual.

Drive your machine up and down slopes, not across the slope. Keep the heavy end of the machine pointed uphill. When operating on rough terrain use extreme caution. Maintain minimum ground speed and make turns wide and gradual. Avoid sudden starts, stops and turns when traveling up, down or across a slope. Stay off steep slopes. **EW**

*Information for this Safety Watch came from an actual accident report and from the Association of Equipment Manufacturers. It*

*is meant for general information only; to order AEM's "Trencher Safety Manual," go to [www.aem.org](http://www.aem.org).*