

PPE problems

When used incorrectly, personal protective equipment can create a hazard

The accident:

A backhoe operator jumped off his machine to assist another crewmember with a load of materials. As he jumped from the backhoe, the strap of his fall protection harness became entangled on the control levers, moving the loader bucket. The bucket moved, crushing another worker between the bucket and a concrete building. The worker was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

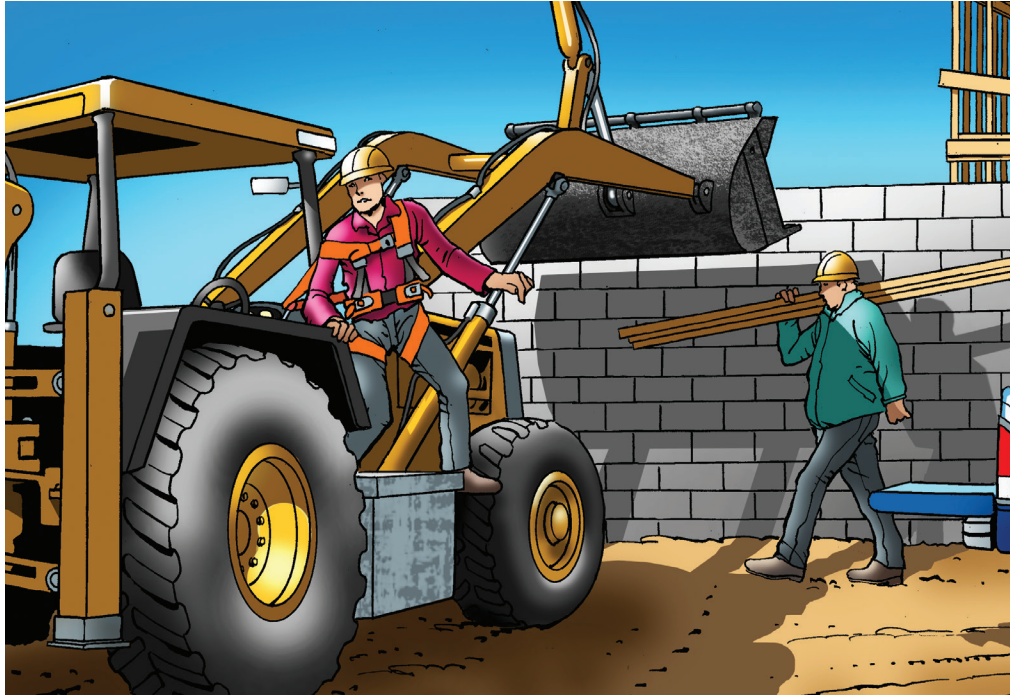


Illustration by Don Lomax

The bottom line: A post-accident investigation determined the operator was wearing a fall protection harness while inside the backhoe because company policy dictated it. The backhoe operator also did not exit the machine in a safe manner. The investigation further determined that, while a safety meeting was conducted on the morning of the accident, the topic was not aligned with the work the crews would be performing that day.

Using PPE safely

In this accident, an inappropriate use of personal protective equipment was more dangerous than using no PPE at all. Employers should not only provide your PPE,

they should also train you in how to use it correctly. Here are some tips to prevent a similar accident from occurring.

Tighten up – Loose or dangling clothing or items are a safety hazard that can be easily avoided. When you wear PPE such as a fall protection harness, make sure you have it tightened well enough so that no straps are hanging loose. Additionally, avoid loose-fitting clothing while operating equipment, as it can get caught in the machine and cause an injury.

Remember the basics – If the operator in the accident had exited the machine using the three-point contact system recommended, he would have been

facing the machine, which would have given him the opportunity to see the loose strap catch the lever before it pulled taut and moved the bucket. Always turn off the machine, then exit maintaining a three-point contact with steps and handrails, and never jump from a piece of equipment.

Get a refresher – If you discover your morning toolbox talk isn't on the scope of work you'll be doing that day, ask your crew leader to go over specifics related to the job at hand, particularly with respect to any hazards you may encounter. Take a walk around the area you'll be working in to familiarize yourself with any potential problems that may arise.

Information for this Safety Watch is from an accident report and from the Center for Disease Control's NIOSH Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Program. It is meant for general information only.



Date of safety talk: _____ Leader: _____
 Attending: _____