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Backhoe Safety Tips

Backhoes are commonly used on most construction jobs that require trenching work. With any equipment it is important for everyone on the project to be aware of where backhoes are operating to minimize the potential for injury. Two common causes of injury or death: (1) being struck by the moving machine, swinging booms, or other machine components; or (2) being struck by quick-disconnect excavator buckets that unexpectedly detach from the excavator stick. The following recommendations can be used to create a safe working environment when operating backhoes and excavator equipment.

- Locate overhead and underground utility lines before beginning work. Avoid working near overhead power lines. If you must work near them, develop a plan to avoid contact.
- Operate hydraulic excavators or backhoes only on grades specified by the manufacturer.
- Position machinery at a safe distance from excavations and trenches.
- Train equipment operators in the proper use of the equipment they are assigned to operate.
- Identify and label all machine controls and ensure they are working properly.
- Securely latch attachments, such as quick-disconnect buckets, before work begins.
- Conduct visual and operational checks on all machine systems and operating controls before use.
- Make frequent visual inspections of quick-disconnect systems, especially after changing attachments.
- Use the rollover protection system (ROPS) and seat belts supplied by the manufacturer.
- Do not exceed load capacities when lifting materials.
- Lower the boom to a safe position with the bucket on the ground and turn off the machine before stepping off for any reason.
- Make all workers on the site aware of the machines' established swing areas and blind spots before the operator works the machine.
- Before each work shift begins, review and confirm communication signals between machine operators and workers on foot.
- Keep workers outside the hydraulic excavator swing areas and clear of attachments when using the machines for hoisting materials.
- Do not allow workers to stand under suspended loads or suspended machine components such as the boom, arm, or bucket.
- Do not permit workers on foot to approach the hydraulic excavator or backhoe loader until they signal the operator to shut down the machine and receive acknowledgment from the operator.
- Use spotters or signal persons around operating equipment when necessary.
- Never permit workers to ride in or work from excavator or backhoe loader buckets.
- Provide workers on foot with high-visibility vests.

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