

SAFETY MATTERS



Safety Matters is intended to promote discussions of safety issues among underground construction professionals. You should always read and understand the operator's manual before operating any equipment. For additional information, please e-mail safety@ditchwitch.com.

TOPIC: Locating

POTENTIAL HAZARDS

- Confined space
- Weather and climate
- Traffic
- Slips, trips and falls
- Punctures
- Animals, insects and plants
- Strains/sprains

PRECAUTIONS

- Never enter a confined space without knowing the atmosphere inside. Air quality testing may need to be done before entering.
- Always be alert while driving or working near a roadway. The working environment changes constantly so be aware of your surroundings.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment. For example, safety glasses should be worn when locating around trees. Locators look down much of the time and may not see hanging limbs.
- A locator encounters animals, insects and poisonous plants daily. Know what to do when encountering and how to avoid an aggressive animal, harmful insect or dangerous plant.
- A hostile home or land owner may approach you. If finishing the job is unsafe, leave immediately.
- Never lift with your back. Lift using your legs, keeping your back straight.
- Always be weather aware and protect yourself against the outside elements.
- Be alert while walking. Pay attention to the ground around you. Be aware of any potholes, uneven ground, curbs, nails, sharp objects, or obstacles in the walking path.
- Be aware of your surroundings. One of the top injuries among locators is slips, trips and falls.
- Follow OSHA requirements for confined space. According to OSHA, 19.5 percent oxygen is the minimum permissible level that work can be performed. Below 19.5 percent oxygen, air respirators are required for workers.

- Poisonous plants, such as poison ivy, can affect you even if you do not make direct personal contact. Oils can be transferred to your skin by an animal or any clothes that come in contact with the plant. If you come in contact, wash skin in cold water repeatedly.
- Be sure to take frequent breaks during the summer and winter. Know the symptoms of heat and cold stress. Wear weather appropriate clothing. Stay hydrated, even in cold weather.
- Wear sunscreen, hat and sunglasses in sunny conditions.
- If a dog attacks, stand still and do not make eye contact. If you are knocked down, curl up in a ball and protect your head.

TALES FROM THE TRENCH

- A locator was at a house where he had previously done some locating. The times of the previous locate, the dog in the back yard never bothered him while he was locating so this time, he did not think about it as he entered the back yard through the fence gate. He did not make himself known and it startled the dog. The dog attacked him. After a trip to the emergency room, several surgeries and stitches later, he is expected to make a full recovery.
- It was the last job of the day; the locator was almost finished and ready to head home after a long day's work. This job was at a construction site with numerous holes and uneven surfaces. The locator got in a hurry and was not paying attention to where he was stepping. He ended up stepping in a pothole at the site and breaking his ankle. He was unable to work for a month.
- A veteran locator was just beginning a job at a busy intersection with several underground utilities. While walking on the edge of the road trying to locate a gas line, he was hit from behind by a car going 45 mph that did not see him. Unfortunately, the locator did not survive.

**DON'T LEARN SAFETY
BY ACCIDENT**