

Keeping Agricultural Workers Secure with Pipe Safety

Working with irrigation pipes can be a high-hazard job if the pipes are not installed, moved and maintained properly.

Hazards can include:

- Contact with electrical cables or wires.
- Contact with moving parts.
- Transportation.
- Trenching.
- Underground utilities.

Make sure your supervisors and workers are mindful of the hazards in the environment in which they are operating.

The big risk: electricity

Make sure your workers are especially aware of the location and height of overhead electrical lines in the area they are operating in. That includes the area where the pipes are being installed, where pipes and other equipment are stored and transportation areas and routes.

If they encounter electrical lines when lifting equipment or metal irrigation pipes, there is a serious hazard of electrical shock and death.

Irrigation pipes range in size and some overhead electric lines can be as low as 18 feet above. Remember that nothing is standard.

When maneuvering, workers should try to keep pipe lengths horizontal, so they do not lift them into a line by mistake.

Also, a good best practice is to store equipment at least 100 feet from power lines, and stay at least 10 feet from lines that carry up to 50,000 volts.

Remember, the higher the voltage, the greater the clearance you should arrange.

Use these same precautions when:

- Installing new pipe
- Moving pipe
- Lifting and clearing existing systems

Finally: Contact local utility companies to mark the location of all of the underground utilities before you dig a pipe installation site. Watch for hidden underground utilities. Tell your crew during the tailgate meeting that if they see wires or pipes sticking out from the ground, they should investigate before they dig further.

Irrigation

Your team should always use the proper trenching and shoring techniques when digging trenches to install irrigation pipes. That includes:

- Safeguarding against engulfment and collapse, which are dangers that kill hundreds of American workers every year.
- Marking trench areas clearly and not parking vehicles near the trench sides, where they may cause a collapse.
- Not trenching more than they can complete and backfill in a day.
- Workers always knowing where their hands and fingers are when they are moving, fitting or dismantling the pipes, in order to avoid crush or pinch injuries.
- Ensuring that equipment loads on tractors are securely fastened before they are transported.
- Workers communicating with each other to coordinate their movements when working as a team.
- Workers remaining aware of obstacles and other workers. They should use a spotter when they cannot easily see to maneuver.
- Workers knowing emergency procedures and first aid in case there is an accident.
- Workers wearing the proper clothing to protect themselves from the sun, insects, and heat and cold stress. Sturdy work gloves and footwear will protect hands and feet.

Finally, there are other safety considerations in the field. Workers should also:

- Practice good ergonomics
- Use proper lifting techniques
- Take regular rest breaks
- Rotate tasks to protect their backs from overuse and injury.

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