

LTAP Training Helps Workers Respond to Trench Collapse in Lancaster

When a hole collapsed and trapped a Lancaster City Water Transmission and Distribution employee in December last year, his fellow workers knew just what to do, thanks to LTAP training that they had received just four months prior to the incident.

Tom Slocum, the city's labor supervisor on duty at the time of the incident, says he and the other workers could see that, while the trapped man was in pain, he was not in imminent danger. "The one thing we learned at the training," he says, "was, if it is not a life-threatening situation, to leave the man in the hole and to call 911."

Within an hour, the worker, whose leg was trapped in the mudslide that occurred when water seeped into the three-foot-deep hole, was rescued by a Manheim Township fire and rescue unit and taken to the hospital for treatment of injuries to his leg and foot.

"The city workers responded 100 percent the way they should have," says Rick Kane, fire chief and emergency management director for Manheim Township. "The number one thing to do in this situation is to not go into the hole and to activate the 911 emergency response system. That's exactly what they did."

Donna Jessup, operations supervisor for the Streets, Motor Vehicles, and Traffic Bureau for the City of Lancaster's Department of Public Works, says, "I can't ever remember in my 28 years with the city that a trench collapse has happened to city employees."

Yet the employees knew what to do in this situation because in August 2007 they had received safety training from LTAP that touched on trench safety and what steps to take if an emergency occurs.

"The training obviously paid off," says Jessup, who regularly schedules training for Lancaster's public works employees. "The workers did what they were taught. They called 911, secured the site, and didn't immediately jump into the trench to dig the trapped man out."



Training Pays Off

The trench safety discussion was part of LTAP's training course on Equipment and Worker Safety, says Sam Gregory, an LTAP instructor. "In all our courses, we stress that if an emergency occurs where someone gets hurt, then the employees should stabilize the situation, providing only limited first aid while being careful not to put themselves in danger, and notify the proper authorities to get the people with the necessary first aid training to the scene to help."

In accordance with OSHA regulations, municipal officials and employees also are taught to shore up any hole that is at least five feet deep and to place a ladder in the hole to provide an escape route, says Gregory. Because the hole in which the Lancaster workers were repairing the water main break was only three feet deep, the city workers did not have to reinforce it.

Employees were digging in the three-foot-deep hole to repair a broken water main in Manheim Township when the south wall of the trench collapsed without warning. One worker was able to jump out of the trench, but the other worker became mired in the mud.

When the 911 call was placed, Lancaster County dispatched its specially trained trench rescue team to the emergency, says Manheim Township's Fire Chief Rick Kane. This specialized crew brings along the proper equipment to shore up a trench and a vacuum to suck out any mud or dirt from the hole. However, once the emergency responders arrived and saw that the man was trapped in a shallow hole rather than a trench, the services of the specialized team were not needed, and the fire company rescuers set to work.

To extract the worker, whose leg was trapped in mud, rescue workers from Manheim Township Fire and Rescue laid a ladder across the trench, lowered a short ladder into the hole, and entered the hole to immobilize the worker and place him on a

long board. The man was then hoisted up out of the hole.

Kane was quite impressed with how the city's water bureau workers did the right thing by not sending anyone into the hole and calling 911 right away.

"Their response is not something we see too often," he says. "Usually people want to jump in the hole and try to save their buddy. When we asked them why they responded the way they did, they seemed surprised and said it was



what they were trained to do.

"I found out later that the training came from LTAP," he continues. "I was really impressed. These workers implemented their training and absolutely did what they were taught to do in that situation."

Make Training a Priority

Municipalities should make regular training of their public works employees a priority, says Donna Jessup, operations supervisor for the Streets, Motor Vehicles, and Traffic Bureau for the City of Lancaster's Department of Public Works.

"You just never know when you're going to need that training," she says. She credits the LTAP safety training that the city's public works employees received last year with the workers' proper response to a recent trench collapse.

The cave-in, which took place in December 2007 while Water Transmission and Distribution Bureau workers were digging in a three-foot-deep hole to repair a water main leak, occurred just four months after the employees had received mandatory training provided by LTAP that touched on trench safety. (See main article for details about the incident.) The workers responded correctly by staying out of the hole and calling 911 to notify emergency responders who were able to rescue the man whose leg was trapped in the muddy cave-in.

Jessup, who is a member of the LTAP Advisory Committee, can't say enough good things about LTAP's training. As chairman of Lancaster's Public Works Safety Committee, she is responsible for scheduling two to three mandatory training sessions for employees each year.

"I usually use LTAP to provide the training," she says, "which covers anything from lawnmower safety to equipment and worker safety to work zone traffic control."

In fact, she credits LTAP with helping to fast-track her career. After working for years as a clerk for the city of Lancaster, she took the LTAP Roads Scholar courses and over the next few years made the transition to foreman to street supervisor to operations supervisor for the city's three bureaus within the Department of Public Works.

"A lot of what I know I learned from LTAP," she says. "It is a big part of who I am and what our department is about."

As an advocate of ongoing employee training, she offers the following advice to municipalities:

- **Make time for training.** "A lot of times what I hear from other municipal officials is that we don't have the time," she says. "Safety should be your number one concern, so you really must find the time for training."
"You just never know when you'll need to employ what you learned," she says. "What happened to us with the trench collapse could have happened to anyone. 'We don't have the time' is a poor excuse. You need to find the time. The grass can keep growing, and the mowing can wait."
- **Train *all* your employees.** Jessup says that because some municipalities only send their supervisors to training, critical information doesn't end up reaching the right people. "The workers who are out in the battlefield, out in the trenches, should be trained, too," she says. "They are the ones who will benefit the most from what they learned."
- **Remember that LTAP will bring training to you, with no fee.** When municipalities complain that employee training is not convenient or close enough, Jessup replies that that is no excuse. "LTAP will come to you," she says. "You only

need 10 to 12 people to hold a class. Invite surrounding municipalities, and you will be able to quickly make up that number.”

- **Stay up-to-date on training.** “Don’t think that just because you took the course once that you are covered,” says Jessup. “Times change, employees change, the workforce changes, the laws change, and procedures change.” For those reasons, she says, training should be ongoing.
- **Make training mandatory.** “I am fortunate that Charlotte Katzenmoyer, our public works director, is supportive of training and allows me to use the word ‘mandatory’ to make sure that all our employees go to the training I schedule,” says Jessup. “Nothing is more important. I don’t care what else you have to do; you better be there. Training is that important.”

For more information about LTAP training or setting up a workshop in your area, contact LTAP at 400 N. Front St., 6th floor, Harrisburg, PA 17120; 1-800-FOR-LTAP (367-5827); www.ltap.state.pa.us; LTAP@state.pa.us.

