



TPM Builders: Safety Inspectors Say Wet Weather Is Not the Only Danger for Excavators

March 17, 2023

Brisbane City, Queensland - March 17, 2023 - PRESSADVANTAGE -

Safety inspectors in NSW will continue visiting excavation sites until April this year, to make sure that construction workers and farmers don't put their lives at risk while excavating.

The NSW regulator for workplace safety warns that persistent heavy rains have deteriorated ground conditions and contributed to a rise in the number of excavation accidents.

This is particularly concerning, given that 74 per cent of earthmoving plant and excavation accidents led to serious injury or death across the state.

Natasha Mann, Head of SafeWork NSW, says it's crucial for business owners, site managers and supervisors to consult with workers to make sure trenches are safe from collapse. This process involves assessing potential risks and completing a Safe Work Method Statement before starting any excavation.

Proper planning before work begins and ongoing monitoring of ground conditions is essential, especially following flooding or heavy rain. If in doubt we recommend consulting further with a geotechnical engineer,

Ms Mann said. "The consequences of failing to properly assess site conditions can be fatal."

Tragically in June last year, a 33-year farmer died from head injuries acquired while extracting a bogged bulldozer.

In a separate incident, a 19-year old apprentice was seriously injured when a two-metre-high unsupported trench collapsed on a residential building site. These are two examples of recent excavation accidents, and safety experts don't want history to repeat itself.

Although the La Nina season is likely near its end; excavators should never let their guard down, as there are more dangers beyond wet weather conditions.

Many accidents occur when workers excavate without first checking what equipment or assets exist beneath the excavation site. There's a risk of rupturing electricity cables when "digging blind", which is a major cause of electrocution.

"Workers can be severely injured if they are struck by earthmoving equipment or if their equipment comes into contact with electrical assets," Ms Mann said.

Todd Mason from TPM Builders says this warning should be heeded by construction managers and workers in other states and territories as well, not just NSW.

"Unfortunately safety problems are widespread in Australia's building sector, and there are many reasons for that," said Mr Mason, general manager of the Queensland-based commercial construction company.

He urges construction workers everywhere to use a free service called Before You Dig Australia, to locate underground pipes and cables ahead of digging. This national online portal allows visitors to request infrastructure information about the location they plan to excavate, prior to commencing work.

TPM Builders published an article about safety in construction, which explores the key reasons why the national building sector has a safety problem, and what companies can do to solve this.

"Safety in construction needs to be a top priority for our industry, given the dangerous nature of our work. It's crucial that employers honour their duty of care to provide a safe working environment, and that safety training is accessible to all workers," Mr Mason said.

For Safe Work Australia resources: visit <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/>

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TPM Builders

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