

National Safety Advisory

Verizon Safety and Health Management

Subject: Manhole Safety. Date: September 2010	Author: George Segur 631-786-4226
Audience: All Verizon OSP Employees	Coverage: Before Start of Next Scheduled Shift

On September 6th in Tarrytown NY a firefighter entered a manhole owned by a utility company in order to rescue an employee of the Department of Public Works who was in the manhole apparently unconscious. Both the firefighter and the DPW employee were overcome and died.

Preliminary investigation information by Westchester Counties' hazardous materials team indicates cause of death was a lack of oxygen, or what we refer to as "dead air."

In manhole entry training most of us have seen the video where someone tries to rescue someone that was unconscious in a manhole and succumbs to death. How many of us have said "it would never happen to me." Dead air is a real hazard. It happens when oxygen in the manhole is displaced by a denser gas. The replacement gas may not be toxic, but the hazard, asphyxiation is.

Verizon employees must test for explosive gases and ventilate the manhole prior to entering. They must maintain continuous ventilation while working in the manhole along with periodic or continuous gas tests, depending on what type of meter is in use. The old axiom "I'm only going down there for a moment" does not negate the need to ventilate and test. Without oxygen, you can be overcome in a matter of minutes, or less.

Incidents such as this one in Westchester County NY are a wake up for everyone that enters manholes as well as those that supervise employees that enter manholes. This tragedy has ruined the lives of many, and ended the lives of two.

REMEMBER TO TEST, PURGE AND VENTILATE. THERE IS NO EXCUSE.

To reinforce OSHA regulations and Verizon Safety Policy, below are references:

Verizon Safety Lesson Plan: Manhole Safety YYMS025
<http://hr.verizon.com/staff/safety/lessonplans/manhole.pdf>

Verizon Incident Prevention Plan, Outside Plant Review Package #6
http://hr.verizon.com/safety_policies/100006.pdf

Verizon Safety Lesson Plan, Personal Protective Equipment YYJS0014
<http://hr.verizon.com/staff/safety/lessonplans/protequip.pdf>

Verizon Safety Lesson Plan, Work Zone Protection YYJS0097
<http://hr.verizon.com/staff/safety/lessonplans/workzoneprotection.pdf>