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Press Release

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Department Encourages Hazard Elimination Following Anchorage Excavation and Trenching Fatality

JUNEAU, Alaska – On Tuesday, June 16, 2015, Samuel Adam Morgan, 23, died in a trenching accident while working for Hartman Construction & Equipment, Inc., at the intersection of 91st Avenue and King Street in Anchorage. This accident serves as a stark reminder of the serious hazards associated with construction work. Construction companies engaged in trenching and excavation operations are encouraged to ensure adequate equipment and systems are in place to avoid similar accidents.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 4,585 workers lost their lives on the job in 2013, and 828 of those deaths were in construction. The Alaska Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement program targets construction work across the state with an emphasis on high hazard activities, such as excavation and roofing work, that are likely to cause serious accidents and fatalities.

Hazards associated with excavation and trenching work are preventable, yet injuries and fatalities continue to be caused by these hazards. Regulations and consensus standards describe engineering controls, protective equipment, and safe work practices to minimize hazards for workers during trench work and excavations when the depth is four feet or more. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring workers are properly trained to recognize and avoid trenching hazards and implementing systems to safely access and exit trenches along with adequate shoring protection, spoil pile placement and/or sloping of sidewalls to prevent cave-ins.

Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Heidi Drygas commented, “My thoughts and prayers are with Mr. Morgan’s family during this tragic time of loss. We are investigating this incident and will take appropriate enforcement action, but Alaska cannot get to zero incidents through enforcement alone. We need strong commitments from all Alaskans and industry partners. Working together, we can make sure all Alaskans go home from work safe and healthy at the end of the day.”

For more information on trenching and excavation safety, please visit the Federal OSHA web site at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/trenchingexcavation/index.html>

The Alaska Occupational Safety and Health Program provides cost free assistance to assist employers identify and eliminate hazards to avoid occupational tragedies. To request a free consultation go to: http://labor.alaska.gov/lss/forms/consultation_training_form.pdf

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