

Protect your heavy equipment operators

NIOSH recently came out with the following steps to protect workers from injury while working with excavators or backhoe loaders.

For site set-up

Contact local utilities and other responsible parties to locate overhead and underground utility lines before beginning to work.

- Avoid working near overhead power lines. If you must work near them, develop a plan to avoid contact and to follow OSHA regulations for minimum clearance (29 CFR 1926.550(a)(15)).
- Don't permit operation of hydraulic excavators or backhoes on grades steeper than those specified by the manufacturer.
- Make sure that workers position machinery at a safe distance from excavations.

Equipment operators

- Train equipment operators in the proper use of the equipment they are assigned to operate. Follow manufacturer's specifications and recommendations.
- Continually evaluate safety programs to address changing conditions at the worksite.
- Clearly identify and label all machine controls and make sure that the manufacturers' safety features are working.
- Install and maintain equipment attachments and operating systems according to manufacturer's specifications.
- Securely latch attachments before beginning work.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for using positive locks on quick-disconnect equipment.
- Train operators to conduct visual and operational checks on all machine systems and operating controls before working the machine.
- Make frequent visual inspections of quick-disconnect systems—especially after changing attachments.
- Use the rollover protection system (ROPS) and seat belts supplied by the manufacturer. Don't remove the ROPS.
- Don't exceed load capacities when lifting materials.
- Instruct operators to lower the boom to a safe position with the bucket on the ground and to turn off the machine before stepping off for any reason.