

Safety Bulletin

SUCTION EXCAVATORS – VACUUM EXTRACTION



Scope: National Highways Supply Chain community

Date: 01/12/2023 **Issued by:** Dave Riley Amey H&SBP

Overview

A suction excavator operator working for a Vac-Ex contractor sustained a cut to his nose when struck by spoil that fell from the skip whilst clearing out residual spoil. The team had tipped the spoil on site in a designated area. Two operatives then commenced manually clearing the skip of residue using long reach tools. Whilst one operative was reaching in, spoil fell from the top of the skip and knocked him off his feet. This also pushed his helmet down onto his safety glasses, which broke and cut the bridge of his nose.



Discussion/Action Points From Investigation Findings

Safe System of Work and Exclusion zones

- The SSoW needs to faithfully reflect all tasks and risks related to the activity, actively implemented and monitored.
- Exclusion zones need to be adequate, agreed, communicated and properly designated.
- Activities for peripheral tasks such as residue removal should also be assessed and included in the SSoW; and influence consideration of suitable and sufficient task lighting.

Tier 1/Principal Contractor oversight and supervision.

T1/PC supervisors need to understand Vax Ex operation and controls sufficiently to adequately and confidently review, challenge and monitor compliance with the SSoW.

- Provide them with sufficient information to enable informed conversations.
- Hold dialogue between the contractor and T1/PC supervisors so there is a clear understanding of the risk assessment findings, safe system of work, expectations of each party and roles and responsibilities of each party - e.g. for setting out the exclusion zones.
- Draw on resources for assisting supervisors gaining more knowledge such as supplier training and use of the [\(CPA\) industry guidance](#).

