

Trench collapse near Main Street results in fatality

Worker dies following construction accident Monday afternoon



The relocation of a utility pipeline along Main Street was halted following a trench collapse Monday afternoon that resulted in a fatality. Photo by Kelsey Kruzich.

By Anthony Tosie

A construction worker died Monday afternoon when a trench near Main Street collapsed, killing him almost instantly.

Frisco firefighters responded to the incident at about 4 p.m. but were unable to rescue the man, who was identified Tuesday afternoon by the Collin County medical examiner's office as 31-year-old Jose Carmen Nieves-Alvarez. The trench Nieves-Alvarez was working in is located next to the portion of Main Street designated as Farm-to-Market Road 3537.

A city official released a statement at 4:59 p.m. confirming the fatality. Allen firefighters arrived on the scene shortly after that time to assist Frisco firefighters as the Allen Fire Department maintains trench rescue equipment that serves the region.

Lt. J.E. Jenkins of the Frisco Police Department said police were on hand to document the scene, although the department won't be handling an investigation.

"Because this was a construction accident, we don't do an investigation as we would if it were a criminal incident," he said. "We just document the scene and make sure there was no foul play – this was strictly an unfortunate construction accident."

Officers and firefighters at the scene said there was no communication or other signs of life from Nieves-Alvarez, a Sherman resident, when they arrived.

The trench Nieves-Alvarez was working in unexpectedly caved in on him, although the cause of the collapse has not been determined. Dr. Sheila Spotswood of the medical examiner's office said an autopsy determined the cause of death as blunt force injuries and asphyxiation. The death, which Spotswood described as sudden, was classified as an accident.

Representatives from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration began investigating the incident to determine the cause of the collapse after the fatality was reported. A spokesman for the government agency said a full report may take months to complete, however.

"OSHA has started an investigation, but it's not yet complete," said Juan Rodriguez, a spokesman for the agency's Dallas regional office. "We can only confirm we began investigating the incident [Monday] at this time."

According to OSHA statistics, each year about 35 construction workers in the U.S. are killed in trench collapses.

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Construction along Main Street had been ongoing to relocate a water line in preparation for roadway expansion. City engineering standards mandate underground water lines that are 16 inches in diameter or smaller be at least 4 feet below ground level, while lines larger than 16 inches in diameter must be at least 6 feet below ground level.

As a result of the incident, Main Street from Hillcrest to Coit was closed the rest of the afternoon and most of the night. The street reopened Tuesday morning.

"With Main Street being a two-lane road with no shoulders or anything like that, we had to shut down the road," Jenkins said. "That was our main purpose – we couldn't have everyone going around the scene while firefighters were working."