

Case 453. 33-year-old water line construction laborer drowned in a 10-foot by 12-foot long, approximately 7-foot deep excavation.

A 33-year-old male water line construction laborer drowned in an excavation. The decedent and a coworker were working in the 10-foot by 12-foot long, approximately 7-foot deep excavation locating and hand digging around a buried gate valve of a 12-inch water main located in the north bank of the excavation. The workers were locating the end of the 12-inch pipe which had a cap on it so that they could tie into it. The cap was on a short section of pipe which was attached to an American 2500 Gate Valve. The gate valve was attached to another section of 12-inch pipe with a Gripper Gasket boltless connection. The pipe, gasket and valve had been installed months earlier as part of a larger water main project and backfilled. The system passed a pressure test approximately three weeks prior to the incident. At the base of the excavation were phone lines. For reasons unknown, the valve came off the pipe on the north side of the excavation. As the water entered, at first slowly, and then gushing toward the south with enough force to push the two workers toward the south. Another individual who was standing on a shelf in the excavation just above the two workers was also caught in the water flow. At one point, this worker had hold of the decedent's arm, but the pressure of the water made him lose his grip. Two of the workers were rescued by other workers who pulled them out of the excavation. The decedent may have become entangled in the phone lines or he may have been struck by the piece of piping. Approximately 20 minutes later, the decedent was found as workers probed the water with a rake. He was pulled from the water and transported to a local hospital where he was declared deceased. After the water was extracted from the trench, the gate valve was located along the southern portion of the hole. The valve did not show any obvious signs of damage. The gasket was also found. The pipe to which the gasket was attached had scrape marks left by the teeth when the gasket came off the pipe.

MIOSHA Construction Safety and Health Division did not issue a citation associated with the fatality to the employer at the conclusion of its investigation.